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The Power of the Picturebook: Examining Aesthetics and Critical Literacy for Imagination

Margaret Parker Helmly

THE POWER OF THE PICTUREBOOK:

EXAMINING AESTHETICS AND CRITICAL LITERACY FOR IMAGINATION

by

MARGARET PARKER HELMLY

(Under the Direction of John A. Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This study was to explore the notion of the power of the picturebook. My intent was to read picturebooks aloud with my reading community not for information or to entertain but to connect the picturebook with the experiences of both the reader and the listener and then to come away from the reading someone new. Ten Gifted and Talented, (GT) fifth grade students, five girls and five boys, participated in the study. This group was predominantly white, middle class. After our read aloud session, the reading community then proceeded to examine both the text and the illustrations aesthetically and critically in order to understand the past, question the present, and imagine possibilities of the future.

My theoretical framework for the study was based upon the theories of aesthetic experience (Greene, 1995, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995) and critical literacy (Freire, 2000, 2005). Upon these two theories, I then built the ideas of Picture Theory (Mitchell, 1994, 2005) as it applies to the illustrations in picturebooks, the evolution of the picturebook (Keifer,1995; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Norton, 1991) and complicated conversation and creative dialogue (Sumara, 1996, 2002; Gallas, 1994,

2003) in order for the reader to use imagination (Greene, 1995, 2001; Sumara, 1996, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1995).

This study represented the effort to challenge my reading community to imagine a world of possibility for others and themselves by reading picturebooks through the lenses of aesthetics and critical literacy. It also represented the effort to challenge educators and parents, alike, to consider reading picturebooks aloud, examining both the text and the illustrations, with their students and children. Each new encounter with a picturebook provides the opportunity for children to connect their lived experience with that particular story. Each encounter provides the opportunity to celebrate difference. Each encounter brings about a different way of imagining. This could be imagining what the author wants us to see, feel, or understand, imagining alternate realities other than those we already know, imagining worlds far different from our own, imagining the past in order to understand the present, and imagining the possibilities of the future.

INDEX WORDS: Dissertation, Picturebook, Imagination, Critical Literacy, Reader Response Theory, Aesthetic Experience, Curriculum

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by

MARGARET PARKER HELMLY

B.M.E. Armstrong Atlantic State University, 1985

M. Ed. Armstrong Atlantic State University/Georgia Southern University, 1994

Ed. S. Georgia Southern University, 1997

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MARGARET PARKER HELMLY

Major Professor:	John A. Weaver
Committee:	Ming Fang He
	Daniel Chapman
	Chris Carger

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Steve, and my children, Katie and Victoria,

For your patience, encouragement, understanding, and faith

For your willingness to keep our home running even though I was often absent

For listening to me when I was excited and when I was discouraged

For sitting up with me late at night when I needed to type just one more line

I love you all more than life itself.

To Michelle Taylor and my reading community,

For your patience and willingness to stay after school

For your creativity, honesty, loyalty, energy, and insight

Always strive for what you imagine.

To Cathy Leaf,

We started this journey together but you were called to a more perfect place.

I know that you have been watching over me

Inspiring me to do great things

I miss you.

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administrators, and library staff continually encouraged and reminded me that I could reach my goal. They all believed in me even when I had my doubts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> And it is in school that the teachers who talk to and with learners, who hear learners, no matter what tender age they may be, are thus heard by them. (Freire, 2005, p. 115)

> Literature deals with the particularities, seduces persons to see and to feel, to imagine, to lend their lives to another's perspective. (Greene, 1995, p. 69)

The purpose of this study was to explore the notion of the power of the picturebook. I wanted to reconceptualize reading picturebooks aloud to children. Based upon the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1995) my intent was not to read picturebooks for the information to be gained but for the exchange of experiences that one brings to the picturebook and one can take. The majority of the students in my reading community are considered white, middle class. Their world is a closed and secure environment where difference is not considered because difference is not a part of their world. Because of this I also wanted to explore what makes the picturebook an appropriate starting point for helping young children to imagine a world beyond their own. I wanted to investigate how the dialogue that takes place between the reader and the listener helps to foster critical literacy (Freire, 2000, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1995) and the aesthetic experience (Greene 1995, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995). Finally, using the work of Karen Gallas (1994, 2003) and Dennis Sumara (1996, 2002) as a point of reference I wanted to explore the multiple ways students can tell their own stories thus helping them find their place in the world.

Context of the Study

At its core this dissertation is about taking a mere twenty-eight page book containing twice as many pictures as words, sometimes no words at all, and using it to awaken the imagination. By awakening the imagination children, anyone for that matter, can understand their past, identify with their present, and envision the possibilities of their future. I would dare say that if a twenty-first century child has only been exposed to one book; it has more than likely been a picturebook. It is my plan in this dissertation to take the reader through the process of what empowers the picturebook and its significance to our lived curriculum.

This work consists of six chapters. In the Introduction, I remind the reader that children come to school with attitudes, beliefs, and customs intact. I know I did and I see the manifestation of these attitudes, beliefs, and customs every day in my school. Federal and state curricular mandates are only a fraction of what should be considered schooling. As educators it is our job to fuse all aspects of learning together. This is where I contend that the picturebook is the medium in which to bring both the formal and informal curriculum together.

As my dissertation progresses, I will study the work of children's literature authority, Donna Norton (1995), in order to trace the evolution of the picturebook medium from its origin on cave walls to the technological marvel it has become today. I will chart the picturebook's history beginning with its use to recount dramatic daily events to its use to carry on the philosophies of the government, the church, and the dominant culture, and finally how it has begun to be used as a sensitive and realistic representation of our past, our present, and even our future. Then I will examine the

works of Perry Nodelman (1988), Maria Nikolajev & Carole Scott (2001), and finally David Lewis (2001) in order to delve into how the pictures and the text come together to tell their story.

Digging deeper into the notion of the image, I will also examine W.J.T. Mitchell's Picture Theory (1994, 2005) in order to understand the power that the visual image wields upon its beholder and how as educators we can use this knowledge to help our students to make choices. Finally, by finding a common thread in the works of Maxine Green (1995, 2001), Louise Rosenblatt (1995), Paulo Freire(2000, 2005), Paulo Freire & Donaldo Macedo (1987), Dennis Sumara (1996, 2002), and Karen Gallas (1994, 2003), I will propose that aesthetics, critical literacy, dialogue, and narrative can be woven together through the medium of the picturebook in order to release the imagination of the reading community.

My theoretical framework is explained in Chapter 3. It is here that I give details of how my study has at its foundation the theories of the aesthetic experience and critical literacy. I then explain how I have built the ideas of Picture Theory, complicated conversation, and creative dialogue upon these theories in order to show how the imagination can be used to create changes in the world. My reading communities, both large and small, are also introduced in this chapter.

First, I will introduce the large school community from which my small community has been taken. I will explain the socioeconomic, racial, and academic make-up of the large community. I will then describe each member of my small reading community in detail. In describing my small reading community I have set the stage for the conversations and creative expression to come in the rest of my dissertation. It is in

this chapter, after meeting both my large and small reading communities that one gets the sense of why I find it almost imperative that I share only a fraction of the wealth of picturebook literature that can take a reader beyond their own world.

I found my inspiration for the next chapter, Chapter 4, in the works of Maxine Greene (1995, 2001) and Dennis Sumara (1996, 2002). In their writing both Greene and Sumara discuss ways of imagining. Greene posits imagining as "[a] friend of someone else's mind" (1995, p. 145) and as disclosing "[a]lternative realities" (2001, p. 74). Sumara suggests imagining as a way to "[g]o beyond her or his daily lived experience into another lived experience" (1996, p. 85) and to create an opportunity for "[i]nterpretations of themselves" (Sumara, 2002, p. 29). Lastly, this chapter will center upon a proposal put forth by both Sumara and Greene that by imagining the past and the present, one can imagine the possibilities of the future. Sumara (2002) puts it aptly by suggesting "[t]o imagine, then, is to create interpreted bridges between what is held in memory, what currently exists, and is what is predicted about the future" (p. 5).

In Chapter 5, I will introduce the picturebooks and the authors and illustrators that held particular significance to the reading community. The picturebooks discussed in this dissertation have been chosen out of dozens that were read with the group. Once the picturebook and its creator(s) are introduced, then I will proceed to recount the conversations that took place within my community. The conversations that I will recount were part of dozens of conversations. These conversations were actually dissected from a cacophony of opinions and responses that all ten of the members of my reading community expressed. I chose to write about the ones that held particular significance to the text and the child. It is in these conversations that the reader will be able to see what

profound responses a picturebook can elicit from its readers; responses at times that are sensitive, intuitive, insightful, but also indifferent, apathetic, and even superior.

In Chapter 6, I examine the creative product and written expression of my small reading community. This chapter was inspired by the work of Karen Gallas (1994, 2003). Gallas contends that children can not only express themselves through written expression, but by other creative means as well. She states that children "Tell stories in dramatic play, in their drawings and paintings, in movement and spontaneous song" (p. xv). In this chapter, I have allowed my students to choose one of the picturebooks that held particular meaning for them and to either recreate or extend the story in an artistic medium that they feel best suits their talent and the book's message. It is in this chapter that I discover the dark and light corners that the imagination is capable of reaching. I also conclude my dissertation in this last chapter with final thoughts about my findings from this study.

Why This Study?

Learning begins even before birth and never ceases until the day we die. Even though we think about school as the place where the majority of learning occurs, Audrey Watkins (in Reynolds & Webber, 2004) found in her ethnographic study of the formal and informal educational experiences of African American women that, "Home is where learning and preparation for life begins, but family life defies simplification" (p.156). It would be naïve to assume that children are influenced only by their parents and siblings. On the contrary, children spend as many as four years not only under the guidance of their parents and siblings, but also under the influence of their extended family, peers, caregivers, and the media before formal learning (schooling) ever begins. It is during this time that many of the values, beliefs, customs, attitudes, prejudices, and hopes for the

future are established. Anyone who has spent a little time with a preschool aged child can attest to the fact that most preschool children are aware of how their own community views the world and how the world views their own community.

Even as the formal learning process begins, informal learning never ends. Curriculum theorists consider this flowing together of both formal and informal learning as *currere*. Dennis Sumara (1996) states, "Currere explicitly acknowledges that there can be no fixed or clearly defined boundary between schooling and other lived experiences; events of schooling become extricable from the path of life" (p. 174). To complicate matters even further, informal learning not only takes place outside of the school, it also takes place within the school walls. Watkins (in Reynolds and Webber, 2004) states "Informal learning occurs at school by means of interpersonal relationships with teachers, other students, and school personnel, as well as through other aspects of the context of school" (p. 157). It is here, within the walls of the media center, standing with my students in the bus or car line, eating lunch in the cafeteria, or even on brief walks down the hallway, I am a part of currere. Through each encounter with my students, I wade into the current of informal learning that was begun at home. Each day I come upon students who swim in a current that is effervescent and teeming with life, I also encounter students who are struggling to stay afloat in a current that is not much more than a trickle of stagnant water. Thinking about what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire states in the first epigraph, it is my responsibility as an educator to wade in and test each current in order to determine what measures are necessary to keep the current flowing.

As the "keeper" of the books at my school, I come in contact with hundreds of children each day. Before the end of the week, it is very likely that every child in my

school has passed through my media center doors at least once. As I talk and listen to the students who visit my media center, I realize that many of these children have no concept that there are other people who have lived and still live in worlds unlike their own. Even though most of these students have money for sports, entertainment, electronic toys, and even books, their families are either too busy or too unaware to be concerned with the world beyond the county-line. Difference is not an idea that is discussed to a great degree. Many parents consider their actions as a way of protecting their children from the harsh realities of the past and the present. They consider themselves protectors of their children's innocence.

The students where I teach live in an insulated world; especially when it comes to the marginalized. Basically, my students are held back by their own closed world; oppressed. Not to diminish the true definition of oppression and those who have been oppressed historically and continue to oppressed by means of violence and tyranny, my students are oppressed by an invisible wall that shelters them for the world beyond theirs. By this I mean that they are content; living blissfully unaware of the world beyond their reality. Because they do not realize that a world outside of theirs exists, it does not occur to them that issues such as apartheid, genocide, immigration, homelessness, hegemony, to only name a few should be questioned and much less discussed. According to Freire (2000) "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 44). Basically it will be up to my students to recognize that a world outside of theirs exists and by doing so realize that they have within themselves the power to imagine a world where these blatant inequalities do not exist and therefore engage in the act of liberation; which is to bring their imaginings into

reality. Freire goes on to state, “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building” (p. 65). As their teacher-librarian, I know that I cannot “save” my students, I can only offer them the tools, literature and conversation, that will enable them to save themselves.

Autobiographical Roots

I know these students because I was one of them. In describing the reality of the majority of the students at my school, I am also describing the reality of my childhood. I grew up in this same school community. Even though decades have passed, the community has quadrupled in size, and the names and faces are different, the nature of the community has basically remained the same. My parents both worked to see that my siblings and I had the necessities and then some. More notably, my parents worked to ensure that we were sheltered from the harsh realities of the world. It was not until I was about ten years of age that I knew someone who was divorced. I certainly was not actively segregated from the few non-white students with whom I attended school, but somehow in an unspoken way; I was never encouraged to form close relationships either.

My parents and my church community taught me to share with the “less fortunate” through monetary giving and community service but I was never encouraged to question how these people actually became less fortunate. In fact I was raised not to question much of anything. Conversations at the dinner table were quite lively because my parents were interested in my daily life. I was allowed to state my opinion as long as I stayed within the boundaries of respect for my parents, my teachers, and any authority figure that was a part of my life. I was not allowed to question any adult decision.

Because I was content with the course of my life, it never occurred to me that there were questions that needed to be asked or decisions that needed to be challenged. The "less fortunate" had nothing to do with my reality.

In my reality the decisions that were made for me only made my life better. In my reality I was taught that if I worked hard I could achieve anything I wanted. For the majority of my life this advice has served me well. I even married someone who fit perfectly within my reality. At first I deferred decisions to him as I did to the authority figures in my early years. His decisions seemed to be what was best for us. At the beginning of my teaching career I exemplified what social researchers, Crocco, Munro, and Weiler (1999), had to say about women teachers:

> As formal school was lengthened and universalized, several factors explain women's entrance into the profession in larger and larger numbers. Presumptions about women's affinity to children, pliability and docility, and availability as a cheap labor force all contributed to their attraction as teachers for states coping with the rising costs of higher standard compulsory education. (p. 10)

I was an agreeable, easily managed, lover of children who was willing to work for whatever my employer was willing to pay. When one is a college educated, middle-class white female who spends the majority of her waking hours with college educated, middle-class, mostly white females, issues such as class, race, and male hegemony are not an issue. It was easy to accept the decisions that were handed down by my superiors, who happen to be mostly men, because I was happy to have a job that I loved. For many years I was content to allow others to make decisions about my method of teaching, my

career, and even my personal life. Like my students, I was oppressed by my own closed world.

Of course, I watched the news. I was aware of the devastation brought on by greed, social injustice, political and religious extremism, and lack of respect for human life and our planet. I wept over events such as the rise of A.I.D.S., the bombings of American buildings, and the slaughter of groups of people such as the college students at Tiananmen Square and the Rwandan people. I was righteously horrified by historical practices and events such as slavery and the Holocaust. I prayed for the success and protection of people like Nelson Mandela and Ghandi. I prided myself for being open minded about the Equal Rights Amendment, alternative lifestyles, global warming, immigration, and affirmative action.

It was easy to be an armchair simpatico because I perceived that none of the preceding events directly affected my reality. It would take some life-changing events in my personal, professional, and even collegiate world that would bring me to realize that the world beyond one's own closed world does indeed have an impact. I learned the hard way that it is not enough to just be a sympathizer of the injustices that have been done in the world. It is not enough to just acknowledge that certain events have happened and continue to happen. It is not even enough to try to understand certain events.

Marla Morris (2001) posits the idea, "[b]ut doing interpretive work around the Holocaust is not just about acquiring knowledge. Rather, it is about understanding the event while standing at the limits of understanding. It is an understanding that is necessarily aporetic; it is to understand that we cannot understand" (p. 6). I realized that it would not be until I could imagine a past where people were capable of inhuman

behaviors, imagine a present where people continue to disregard the need for respect of each other and the environment, I will never be able to imagine a future where the quality of human life is valued for everyone and the earth is preserved for all generations. It is humbling to realize that even as I imagine the past, in all of my imagining I will never truly understand what it was like to be in that place. As I have evolved as a spouse, a parent, a teacher, and mostly a voting citizen, I have been determined to raise my own children to see beyond their own small world. I have also been determined that the students who visit my media center and participate in my reading communities are provided with the books and the complicated conversations that will generate the questions that ultimately lead them to go beyond their own world.

My Passion

Even though I spend many hours working within the formal curriculum as a teacher-librarian, I have at my disposal thousands of books that have the potential to enrich the informal learning process. Considering the words from the second epigraph stated by Maxine Greene, another prominent educator of the 20th century, the literature in my library has the potential to seduce "[p]ersons to see and to feel, to imagine, to lend their lives to another's perspective" (Greene, 1995, p. 69). From the classics to popular literature; from fantasy to non-fiction; from historical to multicultural; from the epic to the picturebook, many of the books in my media center contain the ingredients to begin complicated conversations and the imagining of the past, present, and future.

Complicated conversations that come from the act of reading aloud to children can never be considered a neutral act. According to Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (2002), "Today no serious curriculum scholar would advance the argument that

schools in general and curriculum in particular are politically neutral" (p. 244). Children's literature, from fairytales (patriarchy, step-families, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, hegemony, etc.) to realistic fiction (the Holocaust, slavery, homelessness, ecology, etc.), is a site for dialogue and change. The authors go on to state "The school in general, and the curriculum, in particular, play important roles in both oppression and reform" (p. 244). Much of children's literature is rife with "[t]he ideas and culture associated with the dominant class" (p. 246). All too often children's literature, much like the other areas of the school curriculum, has perpetuated the idea of euro-centrism. It has only been in the last several decades that authors have begun to write historical and realistic fiction in order to question the hegemonic practices of the dominant culture in hopes of bringing about societal changes in the future. One wonders what societal changes would eventually take place if teachers would read popular literature aloud to their students and engage in critical conversations in order to assist them in becoming more critical of this literature. Peter McLaren (2006), a leader in critical pedagogy, asserts:

> The important issue is that the seeds of critique and transformation have been planted as soon as students are afforded the opportunity to become and treated as agents of their own history rather than passive recipients of a history written for them by the ambassadors of empire and their corporate quislings. (p. 18)

Inquiry, questioning, self-reflection, self-discovery and eventually critique should be the goal of the reconceptualized read-aloud. To be transformed and also an agent of one's history should be the goal of education. To teach children to never be passive recipients of any kind of learning should be the ultimate goal.

To teach toward critical literacy is a daunting task. Besides running the risk of inviting criticism of parents and the community, it is very hard not to take on a condescending attitude when students share their ideas. Freire and Macedo (1987) referring to the teacher who engages in critical literacy, "they need to use their students cultural universe as a point of departure, enabling students to recognize themselves as possessing a specific and important cultural identity" (p. 127). I look forward to this task that I hope to accomplish. I want to share a good story; to observe the look of rapture on the faces of children; to hear the laughter that erupts from a particularly funny story and to share the tears that are produced by others. I look forward to reading a story that produces delight and produces incensed outrage; a story that enables children to imagine events of the past, the reality of the present, and the possibilities of the future. Through both the illustration and the text on the picturebook page, I look forward to conversations that may occur and the "coming of voice" of each student.

Summary of the Study

This study, *The Power of the Picturebook: Examining Aesthetics and Critical Literacy for Imagination,* represents the effort to challenge my reading community to imagine a world of possibility for others and themselves by reading picturebooks through the lenses of aesthetics and critical literacy. The aesthetic lens is informed by the work of Maxine Greene (2001) when she states "It is important to understand that 'aesthetics' is the term used to single out a particular field in philosophy, one concerned with perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world" (p. 5). The lens is also informed by the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1995) who explains the aesthetic experience as a give and take relationship

"The relation between the reader and the signs on the page proceeds in the to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed" (p. 26). By examining the picturebook through an aesthetic lens, the reader does not merely determine whether they like the illustration or the story or use the illustrations to complete the text, rather the reader uses the picturebook, both text and illustrations, in a back and forth exchange to make connections between picturebook and the world in which the reader lives.

The critical literacy lens is explained by Ira Shor (1999) as "Essentially, then, critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self" (p. 1). Keeping in mind that the notion of "self" is informed by the past and the present, Rosenblatt (1995) explains this as "[p]ersonality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition" (p. 30). By examining both the text and the illustration of a picturebook, the reader then uses the story to examine and question what has always been considered acceptable in the reader's world.

This study also represents the effort to challenge educators and parents, alike, to consider reading picturebooks aloud, using both the text and the illustrations, to their students and children in order to initiate complicated conversations. Rosenblatt (1995) challenges us by stating "Our society needs not only to make possible the creation of great works of art; it needs also to make possible the growth of personalities sufficiently sensitive, rational, and humane to be capable of creative literary experiences" (p. 262). By recognizing that the informal curriculum flows in and out of the formal curriculum every single day and the picturebook along with the complicated conversation and

creative dialogue could possibly be the key to helping our children understand their past and question their present, they will be able to envision a much more humane future for everyone.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search. (Greene, 1995, p. 25)

> "And you very small persons will not have to die if you make yourselves heard! So come on, now, and TRY!" (From *Horton Hears a Who*, Dr. Seuss, 1954)

To develop a study which I believe will challenge teachers and parents alike to use picturebooks to enable their students to imagine their past, their present, and the possibilities of their future I drew upon several bodies of research; reading picturebooks through an aesthetic lens (Greene, 1995, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1995), Picture Theory (Mitchell, 1994, 2005), critical literacy (Freire, 2000; Freire, 2005, Freire & Macedo, 1987), and the use of dialogue and creative narrative (Sumara, 1996, 2000; Gallas, 1994, 2003). Reading picturebooks aloud and examining both the text and illustrations through aesthetic and critical lenses fosters the complicated conversations that help students learn about historical events that are not covered in the textbook, help students name the social injustices that take place around them, and help students to envision how they can create a better world for themselves and future generations.

Why the Picturebook?

> "What is the use of a book", thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?" (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Caroll, 1898).

> I am interested in the way a page of writing flies off in all directions and at the same time closes right up on itself like an egg. And in the reticences, the resonances, the lurches, and all the larvae you can find in a book. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 14)

The character, Alice, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had the right idea about books with pictures, especially for children. These illustrated "double" stories have the potential to be the foundation for hours of conversation even with the youngest of listeners. These distinctive forms of literature can be read in one session thus leaving room for critical storytelling, narrative, imagination, critical reflection and then closure. These books usually have a small amount of words as well as an illustration on each page. Please note that my decision to refer to a book with pictures as a *picturebook* instead of a *picture book* is taken from the idea proposed by children's picturebook researchers, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001). They state "We have also, in the argument above, taken a firm standpoint by adopting the spelling 'picturebook' for the phenomenon we are discussing, to distinguish it from picture books, or books with pictures" (p. 8). The interconnectivity of the pictures and the story make it hard to separate the two. Picturebooks usually tell two versions of a story at the same time. One version of the story is told through the text and the other version of the story is told through the illustration. Barbara Keifer (1995), a children's literature researcher, states, "I would argue, then, that the picturebook is a unique art object, a combination of image and idea that allows the reader to come away with more than the sum of the two parts" (p. 6). It is the working together of the pictures and the words that creates the whole. In her textbook on children's literature, Donna Norton (1991) describes the picturebook as "[a] balance between the illustrations and the text, so that neither is completely effective without the other" (p. 166).

A History Lesson

> Long before the recorded history of humanity, family units and tribes shared their group traditions and values though stories told around the campfire. (Norton, 1991, p. 44)
>
> "Life will go on as long as there is someone to sing, to dance, to tell stories, and to listen." (Oren Lyons, Native American Artist and Activist)

Picturebooks have been around for thousands of years. It has only been in the last century that picturebooks were written especially for the "entertainment" of children. According to Keifer (1995) "We can trace the first picturebooks back perhaps as far as 40,000 years" (p. 70). The telling of important events and the imaginings of our ancestors has been recorded on cave walls and rock engravings. Keifer states, "Using the products of technology available (there were of course no paper, written alphabet, no printing presses or book binderies), the artists created products similar to the picturebooks of today" (p. 71). She goes on to assert, "The paintings were likely the result of a cultural need – the need to represent through image and myth the basic aspects of survival of the individual and the race" (p. 71). Throughout our history, the need to tell a story with whatever technology available has prevailed.

When one considers the length of the timeline of the printed book, picturebooks for children can be regarded as a recent addition. When one considers the history of mankind, the actual idea of "childhood" has not been around that long, either. Joe L. Kincheloe, noted for his work in critical pedagogy, (in Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002) states "Childhood as we know it, of course, has not existed very long in historical time" (p.75). Norton (1991) explains childhood before the seventeenth century "A child was considered a small adult who should enter adult life as quickly as possible, and stories primarily for young people were considered unnecessary" (p. 49). Norton goes on to

explain that the influence of enlightened philosophers such as John Locke in the seventeenth century considered children's minds as "[b]lank pages"; thus opening the door for an interrelated education for children by considering "[h]ealthy physical development and healthy mental development" and "[m]ilder ways of teaching and bringing up children" (p. 49). Norton explains that in the mid 1700s "Middle-class life began to center on the home and family rather than the marketplace or the great house of nobility. With this growing emphasis on family life, a realization began that children should be children rather than small adults" (p. 51). She goes on to explain that during the Victorian age "emphasis on children's literature mirrored the new attitudes and world developments. Childhood was becoming, at least for middle- and upper-class children, a more carefree and enjoyable period of life" (p. 60).

According to Keifer's (1995) research "The first children's book is generally accepted to be the *Orbis Pictus*, an alphabet book" (p. 83). She tells, "Published in 1658 by John Amos Comenius as *Orbis sensualium pictus* (*The World of Visual Pictures*), it might more accurately be called the first basal reader because Comenius' aim was to teach, not to entertain" (p. 83). It is interesting to note that this first picturebook was written in Latin, the official language of the church, thus making this book only accessible to the children who had formal schooling or Christian training. Norton (1991) describes Comenius as a humanist who achieved his educational goals by taking "[c]hildren out of the conventional classroom and into the natural world" (p. 54). Comenius used the actual observations of children as part of the text for his book. Keifer explains that for the next century picturebooks were used to "[i]nstruct them (children) in moral behavior and Christian duty" (p. 84). Keifer states, "By the mid 1700s however,

the popularity of fairy tales and fables and the continuing success of chapbooks convinced British publisher John Newbery, for whom the Newbery Medal literary award is named, to consider publishing books for children solely for their amusement" (p. 84). Newbery is credited for setting the standard for excellence for the text of a story. Norton credits Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, and Walter Crane as "[t]hree nineteenth century English artists who had enormous impact on illustrations for children's books" (p. 55). The standards set by these artists, of richly detailed, eloquent, sometimes humorous, and often lively illustrations, are what picturebooks follow today. In fact both Caldecott and Greenaway have been honored by having literary medals bearing their names.

David Lewis (2001), a specialist on picturebooks, states "Since the 1960s more and more picturebooks have been published every year so that now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, it is beginning to feel as if they have always been here" (p. xiii). As mentioned several times, these picturebooks were written to educate those who could afford to go to school and to entertain those who could afford them and also had the leisure time to enjoy them. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that children's literature began to reflect the changes that were being experienced by society. From her research Norton (1991) concludes "In the late 1950s, adult characters in children's books were becoming less authoritarian and critical in their relationships with children, while children were becoming more outspoken, independent, and critical of adults" (p. 74). Children in books were beginning to be portrayed as independent thinkers who were independent of adult control. She goes on to explain, "Comparison of children's literature written between the 1930s and the early 1960s with children's

literature written in the 1970s and 1980s reveals both similarities and differences between the characterizations of the American family in the two periods" (p. 75). "Personal responsibility and human dignity" (p. 75) were still themes that ran through each era but the depiction the actual family unit had changed. Ideas such as divorce and the blended and extended family became familiar themes in the later decades.

The notion of "childhood" at the close of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first century in some ways has actually come full circle. Kincheloe (in Canella & Kincheloe, 2002) explains:

> With increasing numbers of one-parent families, the neo-liberal withdrawal of government from social responsibility for the welfare of children, the transformation of the role of women in society, and the increased access to information via new information technologies, the world of children has profoundly changed over the last couple of generations. (p. 77)

Whereas once society considered a child a "miniature" adult by not acknowledging the notion of childhood, expecting children to grow up as quickly as possible and take their place in the world of adults, never considering the creation of toys, books, or entertainments directed at them; our society now acknowledges the notion of childhood with its multi-billion dollar offerings of a plethora of child-centered entertainments. Unfortunately, many of these "entertainments" require children to grow up too fast exposing them to adult themes. Kincheloe states "While certainly childhood and adulthood are not the same, the experiences of adults and children are more similar now than they were before" (p. 79). With the click of a button or a mouse, children can enter the world of an adult. Kincheloe reminds "As children gain access to more and more

information, they need help conceptually connecting and making sense of the data they have absorbed" (p. 97). He goes on to state "Our vision of desirable politics of childhood helps children articulate their own agendas and construct their own cultural experiences and facilitates their understanding of the complex dynamics that shape their relationships and interactions with adults and the adult world" (p.113). It will be in the complicated conversations that we help children articulate, construct, and understand. Through engaging in complicated conversations, Kincheloe promises "The smarter our questions to children become and the more we take time to listen to them, the better we understand the sophistication of their efforts to seek self-direction and construct a unique identity" (p. 115). Picturebooks can be the vehicle with which we start the complicated conversation. It will be through our continued demand and support for authentic children's literature that will encourage the authors and illustrators to continue to tell their stories.

Even as books began to reflect a change in the family unit about twenty-five years ago, this same progressive children's literature was still only written with the white, middle-class child in mind. Not only were these books written with the white, middle-class child in mind, they were written and illustrated by authors who represented this same demographic. Fortunately, according to statistics published by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2009), even though the number of children's books published since 1985 has held steady, there has been an increase in multicultural children's fiction. Out of the 5,000 children's books published in 1985 only 18 were by black authors and illustrators. Citing recent statistics from the CCBC, Kyra E.

Hicks, book author and blogger, states “In 2008, there was a 7.8% increase in black children's book authors or illustrators, 83 in 2008, up from 77 in 2007” (Hicks, 2009). Kathleen T. Horning, Merri V. Lindgren, Tessa Michaelson, and Megan Schliesman, writers for the CCBC, cited even more 2008 statistics, “Out of the 3,000 books sent to the CCBC for review, 9 were created by American Indian authors and/or illustrators, 77 books were created by authors and/or illustrators of Asian/Pacific heritage, and 48 books were created by Latino authors and/or illustrators” (Horning et. al, 2009).

If you are keeping count, these numbers add up to the stark reality that out of the 3000 books submitted to the CCBC for review only 217 were written and/or illustrated by non-white writers and illustrators. This is not even 10 percent! I must remind that these statistics reflect all children’s literature. The numbers for picturebooks by non-white authors and/or illustrators are even more appalling. In their discussion on the 2008 CCBC statistics, Horning et al (2009) state “[b]ut we were again disappointed by how few new picture books showed contemporary children of color” (para. 32). They go on in the same paragraph to lament “When it comes to new books showing contemporary Native American children, the numbers are abysmal”. The reality of this phenomenon is that publishing companies buy and publish manuscripts that will earn money. The authors state:

> We know that there are editors and publishers who care deeply about ensuring a continual output of wonderful new books that reflect the lives of children and teenagers today, but we also know that their passion for publishing multicultural literature cannot always carry the day in meetings with bottom-line number crunchers wanting to know whether such books will sell. (para. 33)

One can only hope that as the demand grows for multicultural literature, the number of books published by the authors and illustrators of the same demographic will grow as well. It is because of public demand that the children's publishing industry now offers fictional diaries, graphic novels, chapter books, and picturebooks that represent different periods of history and multiple subjects. Publishing companies, library advocacy groups, literature groups, and centers for social issues all now examine children's books and award them for their outstanding contribution to today's social issues and to those who have been marginalized in the past.

The Coretta Scott King and John Steptoe Awards are given to writers of children's literature that embody the lives of those who have been considered the "other". These award-winning books give a realistic account of the lives of individuals who have lived through dark times in our nation and world's history and they also give an account of the struggle of the marginalized today. They offer readers a glimpse into worlds far different than the readers' reality. They also facilitate the understanding of the reader who lives the life of the marginalized. Norton (1991) states "Literature is appropriate for building respect across cultures, sharpening sensitivity toward the common features of all individuals, and improving the self-esteem of people who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups" (p. 530). This type of literature is often referred to as multicultural literature. Norton defines multicultural literature as "[l]iterature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature" (p. 531). Richard Keis (2006), in an article on multicultural literature, states "Use of culturally relevant children's books in the

classroom and family literacy projects can serve as a springboard to creative dialogue, critical reflection, and the 'coming of voice' that is so essential to the literacy process" (p. 16).

Keifer (1995) states, "Through the centuries, the artist's role has been to understand the needs of society, and, using the technology at hand, to convey meaning through the pages of a picturebook" (p. 88). She goes on to explain:

> Although culture, society, and the character of the book may have changed, I'd like to think that these artists have remained remarkably alike. Throughout the years there have been people who had some inner need to tell about their world through pictures (p. 88).

Therefore, by sharing their world, they have opened the door for our imagining of the past, present, and future.

The Picturebook: An Aesthetic Experience

Maxine Greene

> Yet the power of art to evoke emotions may be the picturebook's most significant contribution to children's cognitive and aesthetic understanding.
> (Keifer, 1995, p. 12)

"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see." (Edgar Degas)

The picturebook gets its name for just what it is – a book with more pictures than words. While this sounds like a simplistic idea, the pictures contained in picturebooks are far from simple. One must look beyond the line, symmetry, color, texture, pattern, and perspective of the illustration to how both the illustration and the text connects one with one's own world and the world around them. Maxine Greene explains this going beyond the surface of the page and creating a connection with the beholder as the aesthetic experience. Greene (2001) states, "It is important to understand that 'aesthetics' is the

term used to single out a particular field in philosophy, one concerned with perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world" (p. 5). At first glance the reader does make a quick judgment as to whether the illustrations are pleasing or whether a picturebook is worth reading, but a deeper look creates a connection between the reader and the art. Greene explains this connection: "There is a sense in which coming in contact with a work is like meeting another human being" (p. 16). Anyone who has grown up surrounded by picturebooks can probably name several books that were like "friends". These are the books that were read more times than one could count and even bring delight years later when encountered again. My own children, who are now young adults, refuse to part with certain picturebooks from their early collection just as they refuse to part with certain dolls and stuffed animals. Greene promises:

> The aesthetic experience is not simply an affair for feeling or sensation or responsiveness to a beat. Even as we welcome declarations that a specific work has been prized and enjoyed, whatever the reason, we nevertheless hope to communicate the notion that heightened understanding might well heighten enjoyment and extend the range of what is prized (p. 9).

Having the ability to look beyond or inside the surface of the page sets the stage for a relationship between the reader and the picturebook; thus creating both heightened enjoyment and understanding.

This ability to look beyond or inside the surface of the page has been defined by Greene (2001) as a "wide-awakeness". She states:

> Through this awareness, through wide-awakeness brought about by aesthetic education (or by authentic teaching conducted to that end), our students will in some sense be free to find their own voices, as they find their eyes and ears. They may even find themselves free for a time to possess their own lived worlds. (p. 11)

It will be from the connection made with the picturebook that the reader will then be able to take the message of the picturebook, blend it with the structure of their own perceptions, and bring forth a new understanding that the picturebook has helped them to create. Greene promises that when the reader has experienced this profound connection on more than one occasion the reader can "[r]ealize how far we can go beyond 'feeling good' once we become aware of qualities, once we learn what it actually means to be attentive, to go out to the works at hand, to take a risk of going deeper and deeper to gain a sense of what lives beyond" (p. 20). In other words, we will choose again and again to enter into this aesthetic relationship.

Louise Rosenblatt

> A novel, or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24)

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) in the fifth edition to her timeless book, *Literature As Exploration*, explains the relationship between the reader and the text as "[d]efinitions of the aesthetic experience often postulate that art provides a more fulfillment of human impulses and needs than does ordinary life with its frustrations and irrelevancies" (p. 33). Rosenblatt's study of the relationship between the reader and the literary work has been defined as Reader-Response Theory. Art is not just about pleasing the eye it is about

touching a need within the individual. She goes on to explain that by looking at a picturebook aesthetically "The reader seeks to participate in another vision – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible" (p. 7). Oftentimes readers open the picturebook looking for something; that something may not even be definable, yet, but always looking. One would consider the reader who opens a picturebook for the first time as a blank page waiting to be written upon by the work but Rosenblatt explains it this way, "There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works" (p. 24). Every time we visit a picturebook, we see it anew because every time we read a picturebook we have added more to our past and are living a different present.

Like Greene, Rosenblatt (1995) also recognizes that the aesthetic experience of reading a picturebook is about the senses. She states "An aesthetic purpose will require the reader to direct more attention to the affective aspects. From the mixture of sensations, feelings, images, and ideas are structured the experience that constitutes the story or poem or play" (p. 33). Although important and having its place within the classroom, experiencing a picturebook is not all about the cognitive aspects like character, plot, and setting it is about the feeling that the work elicits from the reader. One might even consider this as the author's purpose. Rosenblatt goes on to state "A great work of art may provide us the opportunity to feel more profoundly and more generously, to perceive more fully the implications of the experience, than the constricted and fragmentary conditions of life permit" (p. 37). I can remember numerous times when I have closed the last page of a picturebook and my students and I would sit quietly for a

few seconds because the text and the pictures have caused us to "feel more profoundly and more generously" and we are not quite sure what words are needed.

Picturebooks: The Illustrations

For as long as I can remember I have heard the quote "a picture is worth a thousand words." Luckily for the children's literature industry, namely picturebooks, this quote bears some truth. With the average picture book containing only twenty-eight pages of text and a word count ranging from no words to around a thousand, the addition of pictures on each page serves to communicate the story that is being told. Just as the text in a picturebook is open for interpretation so are the pictures. In fact, the pictures are the first place children are instructed to start when first learning to read. W. J. Thomas Mitchell (2005), an authority on visual representation, states "That is why a picture is said to be worth a thousand words – precisely because the exact words that can decode or summarize an image are so indeterminate and ambiguous" (p. 140).

If one thinks more deeply about that old familiar proverb, one actually could say, "a picture is worth an infinite number of words" because a picture is worth something different to each person who views it. It can also mean that a picture is worth something different to the same person who comes to the picture with a different set of experiences each time. Mitchell (2005) tells us "A picture is less like a statement or speech act, then, than like a speaker capable of an infinite number of utterances. An image is not a text to be read but a ventriloquist's dummy into which we project our own voice" (p. 140). The voice of an image, just as the human voice, can change depending on its external and internal influences. Maria Nikolajeva & Carole Scott (2001), researchers in children's literature, explain, "Presumably, children know this by intuition when they demand that

the same book be read aloud to them over and over again. Actually, they do not read the same book: they go more and more deeply into its meaning" (p. 2). My own children have spent hours gazing at the pictures in a picturebook looking for the subtle nuances that would reveal the meaning of the story. The inquisitive nature of children lends itself to asking questions about the text and studying the picture in order to make more sense of the story. The "what, why, when, where, and how" questions they ask, serve to create a new experience after each reading.

It is this complicated connection between the picturebook and its reader that informs us that our logical perception about the picturebook is false. This perception is that picturebooks are intended only for the young reader and are referenced in most library catalogs as "Easy (E)" books. These books are often enjoyed by the adult and are often not an "easy" read. According to Keifer (1995), "Yet many modern picturebooks are intellectually and visually sophisticated and may demand a range of experiences and developmental understandings beyond many young children" (p. 70). Adults are purchasing these easy books for themselves. Many middle school and high school teachers are incorporating these easy books in their curriculum. Keifer states:

> This should not really be surprising, for throughout its long and varied history, the picturebook has had a broad audience and a wide appreciation as an art object in its own right. That aesthetic experience arises from images and ideas combined in some complete form that is remade as an audience brings to it their own personal intellect and emotional understandings. (p. 70)

It is not hard to find a picturebook that reminds us of a situation, a person, an incident, an event, or a place from our own memories and lived world.

In his book *Words about Pictures*, Perry Nodelman (1988) examines in great detail the prominence of the picture. He also discounts the idea of referring to a picturebook as being easy. Nodelman explains that most picturebooks contain pictures that are far from easy to interpret. Even as an adult and one who reads picturebooks on a daily basis, I find that it often takes numerous readings of some picturebooks before I fully comprehend the connection between the picture and the story. He states, "Given their saturation with meaning, it is clear that understanding the subtleties inherent in the pictures in picturebooks takes great skill and knowledge" (p. 20). Books that are intended for babies, and very young children actually "[d]emand much skill of viewers and readers" (p. 20). On the surface, when one looks at the pictures in a picturebook, one expects a picture that will complement the text but what is often present is much more. Nodelman explains this as a paradox, "Pictures provide both information about the world in being typical and information about specific objects they depict as unique. But it is uniqueness – in personality, in atmosphere, in attitude – that makes the pictures in picturebooks so enjoyable" (p. 209). Basically, we use the pictures in picturebooks to gain basic information about the characters, setting, tone, and plot of the book but by looking more deeply at the pictures we can come to see how these pictures make this picturebook unique from any other. My students look for what makes a book different from another more than what makes it alike.

Getting the Picture

> Images are not just passive entities that dwell in our intestines. They change the way we think and see and dream. They refunction our memories and imaginations, bringing new criteria and new desires into the world. (Mitchell, 2005, p. 92)

It is this unique influence that the picturebook has over its audiences, both young and old, that leads one to wonder what it is about a picture that can incite within us such intense emotional responses. Why do I until this day love the illustrations in *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*, illustrated by Maurice Sendak and detest the illustrations in *In the Night Kitchen,* also illustrated by Sendak? Mitchell (2005) defines a picture or image as: "[b]y image I mean likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or another" (p. xiii). For our purposes the "some medium or another" is the picturebook. He states, "In the narrowest sense, a picture is simply one of those familiar objects that we see hanging on the walls, pasted into photo albums, or ornamenting pages of illustrated books" (p. xiii). There are many picturebooks where the illustrations are "simply" pictures that accompany the text but many picturebooks contain works of art that tell a story of their own. One can look at the work of Jan Brett to see that while a story is being told by the text, another separate story is being told by the pictures. At the other end of the spectrum, Mitchell goes on to state, "In its most extended sense, then, a picture refers to the entire situation in which an image has made an appearance, as when we ask someone if they 'get the picture' " (p. xiv). Mitchell explains:

> The picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium. That is we can speak of architectural, sculptural,

> cinematic, textual, and even mental images while understanding that the image in or on the thing is not all there is to it. (p. 85)

Children want to hear the stories and look at the pictures multiple times in order to get the picture. They want to examine the pieces and parts that work together to make up the picture scene as well as try to understand the context in which the picture has been placed. In a recent storytime, I spent countless minutes just allowing my listeners the opportunity to examine each illustration in order for them to connect not only the image on the page but to absorb the connection of the picture to the previous page, to anticipate the image coming on the next page, and the context within we were talking.

"Getting the picture" or understanding the idea of picture theory has been the focus of many theorists and philosophers. The notion is both concrete and abstract. Mitchell (1994) warns us, "Although we have thousands of words about pictures, we do not yet have a satisfactory theory of them" (p. 9). Mitchell in his book *Picture Theory* goes on to explore the relationship between image and text. He even claims, "My aim has not been to produce a 'picture theory' (much less a theory of pictures), but to picture theory as a practical activity in the formation of representations" (p. 6). He is concerned with not only the representation of the image, but the thinking behind the effect the image has on the individual. Mitchell wants one to "see" the theory behind how we see pictures. Mitchell states, "For anyone who is skeptical about the need for/to picture theory, I simply ask them to reflect on the commonplace notion that we live in a culture of images, a society of spectacle, a world of semblances and simulacra" (p. 5).

In a later effort to explain the idea of getting the picture Mitchell (2005) states, "To get the picture is to get a comprehensive, global view of the situation, yet it is also to

take a snapshot at a specific moment" (p. xvii). When I think of this idea, I think about a typical storytime week in which I read the same book to at least twelve groups of students ranging from the ages of five through eight years old. For each group, the reading of the book is one snapshot of a moment in time. Each individual group connecting to one reading of a story, but at the same time, each individual group is connecting this story to all of the experiences that have come before. Even for me each session is a new snapshot as I continue to connect the ideas that were brought forth from each preceding group as well as connecting the story to my own experience. Each of us as a community of readers, in our own way, experiences the single small picture inside the big picture.

Attempting to picture theory from different angles, as opposed to attempting to "[m]aster the field of visual representation with verbal discourse" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 9) is a shift in thinking. Modeling Rorty's idea that in the history of philosophy every time a new idea emerges it is referred to as a "turn", Mitchell states "I want to call this shift 'the pictorial turn'" (p. 11). He goes on to explain:

> What makes for the sense of pictorial turn, then, is not that we have some powerful account of visual representation that is dictating the terms of cultural theory, but that pictures form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry. (p.13)

Mitchell is suggesting that all academic disciplines need to take a step back and rethink the way visual representation impacts its viewer and the way the mind goes about interpreting that visual representation. This shift in our thinking about pictures takes us from examining the properties of an image such as texture, color, line, scale, shape,

structure, medium, etc. to how the image in a human-like manner affects our ideas and emotions.

Picturing the way we go about picturing pictures is at the same time both daunting yet also exciting. In a way, in order to get one's mind around this idea, one needs to consider the notion that pictures wield a certain power over the beholder. Pictures have the ability to generate a gamut of emotion, a flood of memories, and a zealous reaction. As I mentioned earlier, I can name many picturebooks from my childhood that continue to evoke intense emotion, at both ends of the spectrum. In a way, I have experienced and continue to experience a relationship with each picturebook. The fact that I am willing to engage in a relationship with each picturebook gives each one a certain power over me. Mitchell (1994) states, "[p]ower is not something one 'has' but a relationship one enjoys or suffers" (p. 324). I choose to allow the picture to dominate my perception.

This relationship between the picture and its beholders has been occurring since the beginning of time. Mitchell (2005) reminds, "I believe the magical attitudes toward images are just as powerful in the modern world as they were in so-called ages of faith" (p.8). In other words, even with the saturation of images in the 21st century, pictures still have the power to start a war or fund a cause. He reminds us "Images are certainly not powerless, but they may be a lot weaker than we think. The problem is to refine and complicate our estimate of their power and the way it works" (p. 33). If the beholder is to have control of this give and take of power, the beholder must recognize and come to understand what exactly the picture is trying to "say". Not that we should consider pictures our enemies but part of another Chinese proverb that comes to mind when

considering the power that pictures have is “know thy enemy”. The more we understand about our relationship with the image, the more control we have over our responses.

Mitchell explores the concept of power and our relationship with pictures in his book, *What Do Pictures Want?*. Mitchell (2005) suggests that pictures can be thought of as alive. He states:

> Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively; or they look back at us silently across a ‘gulf of unabridged language’. (p. 30)

In our poor attempt to explain how an inanimate object such as a picture could wield power over a human, we have allowed pictures to take on human qualities. Mitchell explains, “No modern, rational, secular person thinks that pictures are to be treated like persons, but we always seem to be willing to make exceptions for special cases” (p. 31). Treating pictures as a person reminds me of advice that I was once given, “no one makes you do anything; only you can decide your actions.” We have to remember that pictures do not make the beholder do anything; it is the beholder that decides his/her actions. We have allowed pictures to project their wants and desires upon us.

Because pictures have taken on human qualities the notion that pictures have desires is not hard to imagine. Mitchell (2005) has delved deeper into the concept of the picture when he states:

> That is why I shift the question from what pictures do to what they want, from power to desire, from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or better to be invited to speak (p. 33).

Talk to anyone who has gazed upon more than one image and they will tell you that one of the images spoke to them over the other. If we invite pictures to speak then we allow pictures to speak to each of us differently. If we invite pictures to speak then we allow them to project their desires upon us. If we invite pictures to speak then we understand that each picture desires something different. As I mentioned in an earlier paragraph, one does not want to refer to pictures as an enemy or one to be opposed because this would be admitting that we have entertained the idea that they could possibly dominate us. What we want is to treat them as inferior, powerless objects that have the desire to be examined and acknowledged by the beholder. Mitchell explains, "What pictures want in the last instance, then, is simply to be asked what they want, with the understanding that the answer may well be, nothing at all" (p. 48). It is the act of looking at a picture that initiates the relationship between the beholder and the image. This relationship is a power struggle that has been allowed by the beholder's need to get the picture.

Picturebooks: Putting It Back Together

> But from the viewpoint of literary theory, the most perplexing aspect of picturebooks is that they exist at all – that there should even be a kind of fiction that depends heavily on pictorial information.
> (Nodelman, 1988, p. 1)

Up until this point we have focused on getting the picture by examining the image, its mutual relationship with the beholder, the notion of power, and the picture's desire to be acknowledged by the beholder. This shift of focus on the theory of pictures and what the picture desires from its beholder provides us a new way of considering the illustrations in picturebooks. For the next few paragraphs, I would like to explore the picturebook traditionalist's perception of how the picturebook enables its readers to "get the picture". By first examining what the picturebook critics and theorists say about the

relationship between the picture and the text in picturebooks I can then show how a shift in thinking can enrich our relationship with picturebooks.

Perry Nodelman in his book that I mentioned in an earlier section examines the relationship between words and pictures with a series of experiments. Based solely upon the illustrations in a picturebook, both singly and in a series, participants are asked to tell what they think is happening in the story. Even though the participants are able to find a story within the illustrations, their stories usually do not match the accompanying text. From this he concludes: "Words can make pictures into rich narrative resources – but only because they communicate so differently from pictures that they change the meaning of pictures" (1988, p. 196). It will be up to the words to guide the reader as to what the pictures are telling. Paradoxically, Nodelman also contends that the pictures can "[c]ommunicate information that changes the effect and meaning of the story as a whole" (p. 196). A picturebook such as *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak is an example of how the accompanying pictures can make a text less scary. The text contains verbal threats, punishment, wild beasts, and dominance. The pictures show make-believe creatures and a little boy dressed in a wolf suit thus rendering the text harmless and fantastical. This codependent relationship between the text and the pictures leads Nodelman to state, "All things considered, then, the picturebook is a subtle and complex form of communication" (p. 21). By engaging in the act of reading, the reader is immersed in verbal and visual communication. By gazing upon each picturebook page, the reader has initiated the give and take relationship between the text and the pictures in the picturebook and also the give and take relationship between the picturebook and the reader.

Nodelman (1988) introduces the idea that the text and picture are interconnected when he states, "[t]hat placing them (text and pictures) in a relationship with each other inevitably changes the meaning of both, so that good picturebooks as a whole are a richer experience than just the simple sum of their parts" (p. 199). Texts often make specific what pictures do not tell and pictures often make specific what texts do not tell. Nikolajeva and Scott in their book *How Picturebooks Work* take the relationship between the text and pictures in picturebooks even further. They go beyond the view of the text and the pictures as the "simple sum of their parts". They investigate the interconnectedness between the texts and pictures by introducing the notion that even though both the text and the pictures come together as separate entities they create one new unique entity.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) explain the separate entities as "Pictures in picturebooks are complex iconic signs, and words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs" (p. 1). Each, the iconic sign and the complex conventional sign, are richer by being connected to the other. According to the authors the relationship between the text and the image can be described as each end of the spectrum "[s]ymmetry and contradiction" (p. 8). At one end, text and pictures are in perfect harmony, one complementing the other, or they each, in parallel, tell their version of the story. At the other end, it has been found that in some picturebooks, the text and pictures work against each other to create a type of irony or tension in which the reader must resolve by the process of reading.

In *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks,* David Lewis (2001) continues the idea of interconnectedness presented by Nikolajeva and Scott by suggesting a weaving metaphor:

> In principle any text in words could be illustrated by any artist but we expect the pictures and words in picturebooks to be woven together to create a single text composed of two distinct media, rather than text in one medium (words) and illustrated designs in another (pictures). (p. 3)

Like Nikolajeva and Scott, Lewis's weaving metaphor brings to mind two separate entities that join together to create something new.

Lewis (2001) also introduces the idea of the relationship between words and pictures as an ecosystem, each influencing the other; just as creatures influence and are influenced by their environment, words and pictures do the same. He explains "The major gain (by using the concept of ecology to understand picturebooks) is flexibility and complexity" (p. 47). Every picturebook is different. Every relationship between the text and the pictures within a picturebook is different. In some picturebooks the picture depends more heavily on the text and in others the text depends more heavily on the pictures. Lewis reminds, "Furthermore, ecosystems tend to be complex rather than simple" (p. 47). Both the text and the pictures engage in a give and take relationship, each one having more influence than the other at any given time, often within the same picturebook. You cannot change one without causing a change in the other. Lewis then adds "[b]ut one of the greatest advantages of looking at the word-picture relation in picturebooks in ecological terms is that it points towards the role of the reader in the interanimation of word and image" (p. 54). Not only does a picturebook's life depend on

the interdependence of the text and the pictures but also on an outside organism such as the reader. It is the act of reading that breathes life into the picturebook and it is in the act of reading that meaning is created.

The Power of the Picturebook:

A Critical Look

> The purpose for engaging in literary texts, marking responses, discussing responses with others, and representing them in new forms is not so much to illuminate features of the novel. Instead, the goal is to use features of the novel to create conditions where reader responses can become developed, collected, and interpreted. (Sumara, 2002, p. 29)

> Democracy implies a society of people who, no matter how much they differ from one another, recognize their common interests, their common goals, and the dependence mutually honored freedoms and responsibilities. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xv)

As discussed earlier, society since the beginning of time has responded to the need to record the events, and even the myths, that would serve to keep that society alive. We know that the picture preceded text as a method of recording these stories. According to Keifer (1995), "The paintings were likely a result of a cultural need – the need to represent through image and myth the basic aspects of survival of the individual race" (p. 71). As technology developed so did society's ability to tell its stories. As each society adopted a group of symbols to represent text, additions were made to their picture stories. Along with using picturebooks to record events, rites of passage, and myths, picturebooks were used for instruction. Keifer explains, "Whatever the style of these books, the Church became responsible for the continuation of the picturebook, not only to represent and glorify the message of the Church but also as the center for the craft of book making"

(p. 77). Basically, if the Church had the best of the book makers then they also controlled the books being produced. Even though the picturebook moved into the secular world and became more of a product for entertainment, it continued to be used to instruct in the ways of religion and societal traditions. These books were predominantly written for adults.

As also mentioned earlier, childhood is a recent phenomenon. Even though the notion of childhood has been recognized off and on throughout history, it was until the 16th century that children were thought of as miniature adults. Keifer (1995) tells, "Prior to the 16th or 17th century, picturebooks were created for an adult audience. Children were not considered a group apart, separate from adult entertainments or artifacts of culture" (p. 82). Even when picturebooks did become the focus of children, they were intended for instruction. It was the success of John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* in 1744 that marked the beginning of producing picturebooks especially for children.

Technology has always been the driving force behind the success of the picturebook. As technology has advanced so has the picturebook. According to Keifer (1995), "Today's picturebooks attract an audience of readers of all ages and intrigue artists who have discovered the picturebook as a challenging medium for their talents" (p. 87). As the pictures have advanced so has the story. Keifer goes on to state, "Moreover, the picturebook has never been the product of only one culture; it seemed to develop independently from culture to culture around the world" (pp. 87-88). It is the representation of the cultures that has taken the picturebook from its status as an "easy" book which functions as basal reader to a sensitive, art form that "[r]epresents experiences in images for all to see" (Keifer, p. 88).

Unfortunately, many of these books, even picturebooks, have either been banned from the library shelf or have been placed in an "adults only" section of many school libraries. These books have been deemed as too "graphic", too "violent" or too "scary" for young children. Many parents feel that their children need to be sheltered from the atrocities that have taken place in our world's past and the social issues of today. Many parents are not ready to discuss these issues with their children. I have even found that many teachers do not want to tackle some of the issues and historical events raised by these books. These objections and concerns from parents, teachers and the public lead me to wonder about the magical age when a child can handle the truth about slavery, discrimination, racism, the Holocaust, homelessness, terrorism, or even death. Chris Searle (in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) states:

> Children can never be too young to use their skill-in-acquisition of literacy to confront, criticize, or question, as well as to form their own rational attitudes to issues from their own world, whether it be the state of their school or street, the taxes or rents paid by their parents, the sufferings or struggles of other human beings or life anywhere on their planet, or current questions of peace, war, consent, or resistance. (p. 171)

Can picturebooks provide the opening needed to begin a conversation about what is considered forbidden?

It always amazes me that many parents do not want to tackle issues such as slavery, the Holocaust, immigration, homelessness, and the forced movement of Native Americans in the United States but they have no problem allowing their children to read literature that perpetuates stereotypes and hegemonic practices. A case in point would be

the Cinderella story. One would be hard pressed to count how many little girls to grown women of many different cultures for hundreds of years that have been influenced by the events of this story. According to Sumara (in Pinar, 1999):

> Once we understand this, it becomes clear that the texts that are used in schools are not merely things that are transposed onto existing relationships. Because they are extricable from life itself, these texts influence, affect, and change the fabric of all the relations in the classroom. (pg. 290)

I feel that the Cinderella story not only influences, affects, and changes the fabric of the relations in the classroom, but also influences, affects, and changes the fabric of the relations in one's life. With its underlying message of race, class, and gender, the Cinderella story has also influenced, affected, and changed the fabric of relations in society. The fact that Cinderella is still a favorite story after hundreds of years establishes its place in literary popular culture. Even after hundreds of years, society still does not question a story that perpetuates classism, racism, and sexism which confirms that the dominant class has not changed. Reynolds & Webber (2004) explain "Literature is what the dominant class determines it to be. It is discourse that perpetuates and maintains social privilege. Through this discourse of power, knowledge, and imagination, the dominant class creates the literature that maintains the fantasy of order and social intelligibility" (pg. 5).

Can picturebooks provide the opening needed to begin the complicated conversations about the hegemonic practices that have taken place and continue to take place in our world? Miller (2001) asks us to consider, "Literature, particularly storytelling in literature, as well as teaching and writing about literature, seems to have something

essentially to do with the sharing of secrets" (p. 139). Can picturebooks provide the clues to unlocking these secrets? Some secrets need to be told.

Discovering the secrets within a picturebook takes more than one simple reading. I propose that the act of reading picturebooks aloud as a reading community is a good place to begin. Freire (2005) tells us, "Reading is the searching for, seeking to create an understanding of what is read" (p. 34). It will be in the multiple times one reads or hears the text, the multiple times one examines the pictures, the multiple times one thinks about and connects the story to one's own story that an understanding develops. Miller (2002) advocates two ways in which to discover the secrets of a text. First he suggests, "Slow reading, critical reading, means being suspicious at every turn, interrogating every detail of the work, trying to figure out by just what means the magic is wrought" (p. 122). The other way is "interrogation of the way a literary work inculcates beliefs about class, race, or gender relations. These are seen as modes of vision, judgment, and action presented as objectively true but actually ideological" (p. 123). Both discovering the finer details of how the author and illustrator created the picturebook and the ideological motivation behind the picturebook serves to provide the reading community a starting point for critical reflection.

Reading Aloud for Critical Literacy

> Literary works, it should be remembered, have always had a powerful critical function. They challenge hegemonic ideologies, as well as reinforcing them. (Miller, 2002, p. 123)

> A literacy that develops learners' consciousness of personal rights, literacy enacted as a process of search and creation, literacy that results in a learners' critical presence in the world, offers promise of changing the world even as it changes learners' ways of being in that world. (Robinson, 1990, p. 272)

Those who observe storytime in my library might be taken aback by the give and take between the reader and the listeners. It often takes twice as long to read a picturebook aloud because of the conversations that take place. These conversations are based upon the text as well as the pictures. I take to heart the that when I read aloud to children I take on the responsibility of not only reading the text but also helping the listener make meaning of what has been read. Freire and Macedo (1987) explain "Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world." (p. 29) Children need to be given the opportunity to connect their reality with the reality of others.

As a group we compare the reality of each story to what we know and accept as our own reality. Lankshear & McLaren (1993) suggest, "To this extent, critical reflection is consciously guided by the intention to change understanding of the world and, in the same process, to change that very world we inhabit and are trying to understand" (p. 38). We discuss the notion that what we know as reality does not always make our reality the only one or the right one. We also discuss how some picturebooks serve to perpetuate a dominant class or ideology. According to Michael Apple (as cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993), "Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate truth" (p. 198). As a result of the dialogue in our reading community both the reader and the listeners learn to recognize that picturebooks are the result of an artist's vision, history, and beliefs. Both the reader and the listeners come to understand that an artist's vision, history, and beliefs do not always consider or include those we know as "other".

It is the coming together of collective visions, histories, and beliefs of the reader, the listeners, and the picturebook that creates the reading community. It is in the exchanging of ideas that the reader, the listeners, and the text become a group working to create new ideas. Freire (2005) states "By listening to and so learning to talk with learners, democratic teachers teach learners to listen to them as well" (p. 115). Even though I read the same story to multiple groups I find that the multiple conversations that develop help me to see the same story with new eyes at each reading. Sumara (2002) reminds:

> The purpose for engaging in literary texts, marking responses, discussing responses with others, and representing them in new forms is not so much to illuminate features of the novel. Instead, the goal is to use features of the novel to create conditions where reader responses can become developed, collected, and interpreted. (p. 29)

I also find that by allowing time to listen to my students, they learn to listen to each other as well. According to Freire, (2005):

> To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know. (p. 102)

Gary Anderson & Patricia Irvine (in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) state, "Exploring students' personal experience is the first step in countering the idea that meaning exists only in structures external to the individual. It also brings into the classroom the culture of the community, not just that of the institution" (p. 92). By allowing my students to

bring their own community into our discussions, we have created together our own unique reading community.

There occurs the possibility that each time a new picturebook is introduced in our reading community the reading community itself will become new. Sumara (1996) states:

> Like any component of curriculum, these texts influence, affect, and change the fabric of all the relations in the classroom. Choosing this book over that is to choose one complete fabric of relations over another, for in pulling one thread of the curricular fabric we alter the whole thing. (p. 6)

Each read-aloud begins anew the opportunity for the relationships within the classroom to either draw closer or move apart. Miller (2002) affirms, "In my own case, reading certain books has been decisive for my life. Each such book has been a turning point, the marker of a new epoch" (p. 120). There is a wealth of picturebooks that have the potential to create a new epoch in the reading community. At the advent of each epoch should come the prospect of new stories, new complicated conversations, and new possibilities.

Rosenblatt (1995) explains the use of literature for thinking critically as "When the student has been moved by the work of literature, he will be led to ponder on questions of right and wrong, of admirable or antisocial qualities, of justifiable or unjustifiable actions" (p. 16). It is from the connection with the reader's past and present that differences are recognized and either questioned or accepted. She goes on to state "Literature treats the whole range of choices and aspirations and values out of which the individual must weave his own personal philosophy" (p. 19). It is the connection made between what we bring to the picturebook and the picturebook itself that either leaves us the same or makes us different. Rosenblatt indicates that we never come away the same

from a picturebook by stating “Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew” (p. 107). This is for both the work and the reader.

One has to recognize that we all do not bring to the picturebook the same past and present, therefore what we take away from the experience will not be the same as well. Rosenblatt (1995) reminds “[i]f his own experience of life is limited, if his moral code is rigid and narrow or slack and undiscriminating, the quality of his response to literature will necessarily suffer” (p. 51). What we disappointingly see as an indifferent or negative response to a picturebook may only be the lack of point of reference that is brought to the picturebook. She clarifies this idea of what we bring to the picturebook by stating “Without linkage with past experiences and present interests of the reader, the work will not come alive for him, or, rather, he will not be prepared to bring it to life” (p. 77). Rosenblatt addresses this lack of experience by suggesting the introduction of more literature. She states “Books are a means of getting outside the limited cultural group into which the individual is born” (p. 184). She also goes on to say “Literature not only makes possible the experience of diverse patterns of the past and the present; it also offers the opportunity to envisage new and more desirable patterns” (p. 186). What our students lack in their own life experience can be made up by the use of literature, in our case, the picturebook. Rosenblatt assures that literature makes up for what the textbook lacks by explaining “Of all of the elements that enter into the educational process – except of course, the actual personal relationships and activities that make up community life of the school – literature posses the greatest potential for that kind of assimilation of ideas and attitudes” (p. 173).

We must remember that some of our students are not ready to think critically. It is our responsibility through dialogue to help them get to this place. Rosenblatt tells the educator "The task of education is to supply him with the knowledge, the mental habits, and the emotional impetus that will enable him to independently solve his problems" (p. 125). Critical dialogue is the key to creating a community. Critical dialogue is also an acquired skill. All too often we think of dialogue as a question and answer session between the expert and the novice. Freire (2005) states "For us, however, the requirement is seen not in terms of explaining to, but rather dialoguing with the people about their actions" (p. 53). This is why my storytime sessions take so long. Freire cautions, "How can I listen to the other, how can I hold a dialogue, if I can only listen to myself, if I can only see myself, if nothing or no one other than myself can touch me or move me?" (p. 72). I find that I learn many things about myself by listening to the thoughts of children. Keis (2006) states, "The use of culturally relevant children's books in the classroom and family literacy projects can serve as a springboard to creative dialogue, critical reflection, and the 'coming of voice' that is so essential to the literacy process" (p. 16). I find that through the exchange of ideas with my students I have also found my own unique voice. One must keep the words of Freire (2000) in mind while engaging in this act:

> The important thing, from the point of view of the libertarian education, is for people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly to manifest their own suggestions and those of their comrades. (p. 124)

It will be that creative back and forth of dialogue that will facilitate their understanding of their world so that they will "come to feel like masters of their thinking".

Creative Dialogue

> Children's narratives are not naturally confined to the spoken or written word. From early childhood on they tell stories in dramatic play, in their drawings and paintings, in movement and spontaneous song." (Gallas, 1994, p. xv)

> Stories, poems, dance performances, concerts, paintings, films, plays – all have potential to provide remarkable pleasure for those willing to move out toward them and engage with them. (Greene, 1995, p. 27)

Children need to tell their stories. In doing so they not only give the listener a glimpse of their world but by telling their story aloud they seem to be able to come to terms with the reality of their world. All too often teachers become wrapped up in the "list" of everything that needs to be taught during the day and do not allow time for children to share their stories. Karen Gallas (1994), a teacher-researcher who has done extensive work on children's narratives, explains "For children, meaning is built into stories; they use narrative to construct mental models of their experience, to make the work they inhabit sensible." (p. xiv). Gallas extends the notion of narrative to "[a] complex of signs and texts that make children's thinking visible." (p. xiii). Several years ago a teacher at my school proudly showed me an idea she found in a teacher magazine which was to have any child who wanted to tell a story write it on a 3x3 sticky note and post it on the classroom closet door. She promised to read all of the stories each day after the students had gone home. She happily reported that after she began this practice, students stopped bothering her with their stories. I remember being appalled by this practice and at her apparent satisfaction with this idea. Gallas tells, "Children's narratives, if uncovered and honored in the context of the classroom, can become

powerful vehicles for thinking and learning" (pg. xiv). The teacher's intent for a more efficient classroom resulted in untold stories and lost opportunities.

Children need the opportunity to tell their stories in multiple ways. Gallas (1994) states, "As teachers recognize that children can communicate what they understand though pictures, dances, songs, poems, and dramas, these products of the learning process offer them a more complete picture of the children they teach" (pp. 112-113). The students at my school have the opportunity each year to express their learning through technology. They may choose one subject or idea and create a digital production. The work they produce is incredible. The multiple ways they devise to share their knowledge never ceases to amaze me. Gallas explains, "When teachers and children begin to speak about learning through the arts, they initiate new kinds of conversations, some of which may not rely on the spoken word" (p. 113). Many of these media productions express immeasurable learning without using one word except for the opening and closing credits. Gallas tells:

> So in this sense I think it safe to say that higher-level thinking cannot occur without the presence of creative thinking in partnership with critical thinking. And this kind of thinking that I believe most teachers hope their children will achieve. (p. 117)

As I walk down the hallways I observe all too often a worksheet being used as assessment when a digital camera or digital painting would have sufficed. In most cases the regurgitation of facts takes very little effort, mental processing, or imagination. As educators we need to spend more time in our classrooms as a reading community, reading literature, namely picturebooks aloud, examining each page, engaging in complicated

conversations, creatively sharing our thinking, and imagining the possibilities of what such a community can achieve. Greene (1995) reminds:

> If those children do have imagination to adjust to what they gradually find out about the intersubjective world as they move further and further from the views of the original home, they are bound to reinterpret their early experiences, perhaps to see the course of their lives as carrying out the possible (among numerous possibilities) rather than the necessary. (p. 21)

Imagining beyond the necessary is truly a worthy goal.

Imagining: The Past; The Present; The Future

> But the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected. (Greene, 1995, p. 28)

> By imagining, we are enabled to look at things, to think about things as if were otherwise. (Greene, 2001, p. 65)

The picturebook has the potential to create opportunities for imagining the past, present, and future. Greene (1995) states that even though, "Literature does not replace historical description, literature does tell about historical events in a way that the young reader can understand" (p. 186). Sumara tells, "It is not so much the way the text is structured; it is the way in which the text is perceived and interpreted by the reader" (p. 28). A well-written picturebook read aloud by someone who has chosen to embody that story can evoke imaginings of a life far different from one's own life or a life that resembles one's own life. It is in the act of imagining that the story becomes part of the reading community.

If curriculum is all at once language, culture, learning, and teaching and the stories that we read aloud are the means with which the reading community's responses

can become developed, collected, and interpreted, then the release of imagination should be the ultimate goal when a picturebook is read aloud. Greene (1995) affirms, "But imagination may be released through the reading, and when it is, meanings derived from experiences often find their way through the gateway of imagination" (p.76).

In a curriculum of imagination meaning can be found only after one has gotten lost; lost in the text as well as the picture. Sumara (1996) states, "When the literary imagination is invoked as part of the school curriculum, and students and teachers are prepared to become lost for a time in the relations inspired by the text, the thrill of being found is announced" (p. 232). The reading community must not only get lost in the story created by both the text and the picture but also lost in the connection that reading and discussing literature together can create. Laughing, crying, gasping, delighting, discussing, debating, sharing, listening, and imagining are all part of what is perceived as a reading community that has become lost in a story. Greene (2001) tells:

> The community we achieve, the dialogues we enter take shape across the differences, preventing those differences from tearing us apart, linking in us a desire to see more, feel more, understand more, listen more acutely, dip more passionately into life. (p. 148)

No matter what lived experience or difference we bring to the reading community, each new encounter with a picture book provides the opportunity for each member to share and connect their lived experience with that particular story. Each encounter provides the opportunity to celebrate difference. Each encounter brings about a different way of imagining. This could be imagining what the author wants us to see, feel, or understand, imagining alternative realities other than those we already know, imagining worlds far

different from our own, imagining the past in order to understand the present, and imagining the possibilities of the future. It is possible that by imagining in these ways one can dip more passionately into life.

Rosenblatt (1995) picks up the torch of imagination as the route to dip more passionately into life when by explaining "It has been said that if our imaginations functioned actively, nowhere in the world would there be children who are starving" (p. 176). In other words, if we would develop the capacity to imagine the sufferings of others we would become passionate about the need to alleviate the suffering of others. She goes on to urge "We must also develop the capacity to feel intensely the needs and sufferings and aspirations of people whose personal interests are distinct from our own, people with whom we may have no bond other than our common humanity" (p. 178). By providing our students with the literature and dialogue needed to develop the imagination, then we have given them the tools to develop the capacity to feel. Rosenblatt states:

> But this means also in the development of the imagination; the ability to escape from the limitations of time and place and environment, the capacity to envisage alternatives in ways of life and in moral and social choices, the sensitivity to thought and feeling and needs of other personalities. (p. 276)

Providing the opportunity to come lost in the story creates that place of escape to think, to feel, to imagine, and then to change.

Many of the children that come to storytime in my media center are unaware of a world beyond our county line. Their lived experience consists of the events that take place within their families, community sports, and the requirements of school. Sumara

(1996) states, “It is through the imaginative experiences that the reader is able to go beyond her or his daily lived experience into another lived experience as conditioned by literary experience” (p. 85). All too often educators miss the opportunity to use reading aloud to transport these students beyond their lived worlds. Greene (1995) laments:

> Too rarely do we have poor children in mind when we think of the way imagination enlarges experience. Focusing on remediation for these children, we overlook the ways in which imagination opens windows in the actual, discloses new perspectives, to shed a kind of light. (p. 36)

These are the students who sit in front of the computer screen, working through the remedial reading software while wondering about the book that the teacher will read to the rest of the class during “free” reading time. As a result, these students never encounter the notion that there are people in the world who have led lives far different from theirs. Sumara (1996) states, “The relationship with the literary fiction, then is not merely an escape from the reader’s lived world; it is a relationship which, through the space opened up by the conditioned imagination of the reader, becomes a transformative space” (p. 80). By imagining the lived world contained in the story, the reading community can interpret and transform their own lived world.

Imagining that there are lived worlds where people are not free to choose their paths, where people worry about their next meal, or where people wonder if their lives will be cut short by violence, disease, or natural disaster puts our understanding of our own lived worlds into perspective. According to Noddings (as cited in Ayers and Miller, 1998), “The recommendation is not merely for literature and art appreciation, but for the

use of literature to deepen self-understanding" (p. 161). It is from the picturebook that the reading community can understand the importance of artifacts from one's past.

When one thinks about the running of the course of our lives and the individual layers that make up our identities, one can see how the curriculum of schooling is lacking. One can also see where high stakes testing falls short of authentic learning. As educators who are working towards a reconceptualization of how students should be taught, we need to continue to strive for the chaotic, the ambiguous, the serendipitous, the unanticipated, the unexpected, and the undiscovered. We need to create within our classroom walls a community where dialogue and imagining takes precedence over worksheets, drill and practice, and multiple-choice assessment. We need to demand that libraries become overflowing with books in order to immerse children in as many books as possible. They need to be located where all children can be a part of the reading community. Freire and Macedo (1987) tell us:

> There is a need to have a popular library centered on this idea of reality in context, stimulating true seminars of reading, where readers seek critical insight into the text, trying to learn the most profound meaning, proposing to the readers an aesthetic experience, involving rich resonances of the popular language. (p. 45)

In our schools, creating a reading community where the teacher reads aloud to his or her students needs to be at the center of every classroom. Sumara (1996) tells:

> When literary fiction is brought into the school classroom and the literary imagination is invoked it is not the text that does the gathering; it is the teacher who dwells with her students in the commonplace location of shared reading. (p. 190)

Through the use of picturebooks, young children can be introduced to what it means to create a reading community. By reconceptualizing the way we read aloud to our students we can cultivate new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling and imagining. By reading aloud both critically and aesthetically towards a curriculum of imagination, the reading community can come to terms with its sense of identity and imagine the possibilities of the future.

Summary of the Literature

The works of many scholars have been reviewed in an effort to ground this research inquiry. Bodies of research include those exploring reading picturebooks through an aesthetic lens (Greene, 1995, 2001, Rosenblatt, 1995), Picture Theory (Mitchell, 1994, 2005), critical literacy (Freire, 2000; Freire, 2005, Freire & Macedo, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1995), and the use of dialogue and creative narrative (Sumara, 1996, 2002; Gallas, 1994, 2003). These bodies of research support the idea that teachers and parents should acknowledge that reading picturebooks aloud and examining both the text and illustrations through aesthetic and critical lenses fosters the complicated conversations that help students learn about historical events that are not covered in the textbook, help students name the social injustices that take place around them, and help students to envision how they can create a better world for themselves and future generations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my study has at its foundation the theory of aesthetic experience as it is explained by Maxine Greene (2001) in her book *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* and Louise Rosenblatt (1995) in her work *Literature as Exploration*. By viewing the picturebook through the aesthetic lens of both Greene and Rosenblatt, the reader goes beyond determining whether the text and illustration of the picturebook is "pleasing" but instead the reader is "concerned with perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world" (Greene, p. 5) and the reader focuses "attention on the private as well as the public, aspects of meaning" (Rosenblatt, p. 292).

Critical literacy theory is also at the foundation of my theoretical framework. Ira Shor (1997) states "Critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development" (para. 2). Put in context with the picturebook, Paulo Freire& Donaldo Macedo (1987) explain, "To sum up, reading always involves critical perception, interpretation, and rewriting of what is read" (p. 36). By reading picturebooks aloud to students in order to understand the past and question the present, both the reader and the listener set out to rewrite the future. Louise Rosenblatt (1995) describes using literature as a means to question the status quo by stating "[a] democratic society, whose institutions and political and economic procedures are constantly being developed and remolded, needs citizens with the imagination to see

what political doctrines mean for human beings" (p. 176). By having the capacity to see into to depths of the status quo, the dominant society, hegemony, genocide, forced immigration, homelessness, and atrocities of the past, one then also has the capacity to see a different future.

Upon these two theories I then build the ideas of Picture Theory (Mitchell, 1994, 2005) as it applies to the illustrations in picturebooks, the evolution of the picturebook (Keifer,1995; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Norton, 1991), and complicated conversation and creative dialogue (Sumara, 1996, 2002; Gallas, 1994, 2003) in order for the reader to use imagination (Greene, 1995, 2001; Sumara, 1996, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1995) to understand the past, question the present, and be a part of change for the future.

This study was conducted using a combination of narrative analysis and critical qualitative research (Merriman, 2002). Narrative analysis is defined as "[t]he key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form" (p. 9). My reading community through complicated conversation, journal writing, and creative expression shared their understanding of the past, present, and future based upon their own life experiences. Critical qualitative research "[u]ncovers, examines, and critiques social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our thinking and being in the world" (p. 9). Through the use of culturally diverse picturebooks and complicated conversation that the reading community began to question what was accepted in the past, and is still accepted in the present in order to change the future.

Collecting Stories

I used a variety of methods to collect the reactions and responses of my small reading community to the historical, multicultural, and ecological picturebooks that were used in my study. First, I used field notes taken during our reading time together thus gathering bits and pieces of dialogue as well as my impressions of student reaction and body language, I used videotape transcriptions of exact dialogue between myself and the students, and I also used student journals to collect the private thoughts of the students, often giving them a peer-free way of expressing additional reactions to the text and the conversations about the text. Finally, I used the creative expression of each member of the reading community as they found significance with a particular text.

Please note that upon reading the individual transcripts of my conversations with each child that it would appear that I was able to enjoy an isolated complicated conversation with each student. This was not the case. The conversations that I transcribed were actually pulled from multiple conversations that were taking place at the same time. As mentioned earlier, I isolated conversations that I felt were particularly significant to the child, the message of the picturebook, and our reading community.

My Read-Aloud Communities

> One cannot say simply, fully or unambiguously what one's life is or what one means. (Sumara, 2002, p.7)

> And will you succeed? Yes indeed, yes indeed! Ninety-eight and three-quarters percent guaranteed! (*Oh, the Places You'll Go,* Dr. Seuss, 1990)

My School Community

During the school year, I read aloud to every student in my school, from kindergarten through fifth grade. Often these reading opportunities center on a theme or

special occasion, but most of the literature I choose provides a window into the world outside the reality of my reading community. I often slip in a quick "read-aloud" while performing my role as teacher-librarian, which is when I am in the classroom as an information specialist. My read-aloud community is about 630 students strong; spanning from kindergarten through fifth grade. As mentioned earlier in my dissertation, this community represents students whose lived experience consists of the events that take place within their families, community sports, church activities, and the requirements of school. The majority of these students are middle-class, Anglo-Americans. Less than 10% of the school population is non-white. The majority of this small percentage is also middle-class. Many of the students in my read-aloud community have parents who have either a college or technical education. Many of their parents have jobs either in the manufacturing industry or the military. One might think that a large military population would translate as a transient population but this is not the case. The positions that most of our military parents fill are stable. Last school term only 14% of my read-aloud community qualified for reduced or free lunch. This number was slightly higher than previous years due to a downturn in the economy. Even though, more of these students than one would like to imagine have been touched in some way by illness, divorce, parental separation, death, and even abuse, the majority of them have no concept of what it means to be hungry, homeless, enslaved, terrorized, or hopeless. Many of them have even suffered at the hands of racial, gender, and social bias, but none of them have ever experienced violent racism, ethnic cleansing, or forced immigration. As stated earlier, I am a product of this community. I am well aware of the lengths well intentioned, middle-class Anglo-American parents will go to protect their child from the harsh realities of the

world. I am well aware of the lengths that well intentioned, middle-class Anglo-American parents will go to ensure that their child has the hope of living the "American Dream".

No matter the age of the student, I often notice that as each year progresses, the conversations become more complicated, the narratives become more personal, the responses become more creative, and the questions become more critical. Each reading event builds upon the other offering my students an opportunity to not only connect each story to the other but also to connect the stories to their own lives. Each reading event allows the students to make the connection between the story that the text is telling and story that the illustrations are telling. Each reading event also builds upon the other as a way to reassure the reading community that their questions and responses will be valued. Each time a student takes a risk and finds a safe harbor for thoughts and questions asked aloud, it makes it easier the next time to chart unknown waters. Gallas (1994) reminds us "When children are continuously offered opportunities to express their stories about the world through many avenues, they show that the power and range of their intellectual and creative pursuits are unbounded" (p. xvi). Usually by the end of a school term, each reading community has truly become a community of thinkers, artists, and dreamers.

My Small Group

> One of the dangers we face in our educational system is the loss of a feeling of community, not just the loss of closeness among those with whom we work and with our students, but also a loss of feeling of connection and closeness with the world beyond the academy. (hooks, 2003, p. xv)

> "We've got to make noises in greater amounts! So, open your mouth, lad! For every voice counts!" (From *Horton Hears A Who*, Dr. Seuss)

Specifically for my dissertation, I chose to reread many of my favorite picturebooks to an intimate reading community of ten students. I chose this small reading

community for several reasons. My first reason was based upon the need for flexible scheduling and the ease of securing the cooperation of only one teacher, their academic enrichment teacher, as opposed to their six regular academic teachers. My chosen group is pulled one day a week from their regular academic classrooms for academic enrichment services; which my county has labeled as "Gifted and Talented" (GT). Another reason I chose this particular group is because they typify the demographic that I discussed in the preceding section. The only manner in which this group of ten students differs from the majority of my school population is that they have been labeled as "gifted and talented" under special education standards. They are all very verbal and have all scored above average on standardized tests as well either creativity or motivation tests. Out of these ten students, there are seven white students, one Hispanic student, and two students whose father is black and mother is white. The group is evenly mixed with males and females. All of these students are involved in extra-curricular activities such as community sports, scouting, dancing, gymnastics, etc. The majority of these students attend a church within the community. Seven of the ten students have at least one parent who has a college education with five of the ten having both parents who either have a college education or a formal technical education. Eight of the ten students come from a middle-class socio-economic level with parents who are in professional, managerial, or technical positions. Only one student in this group would be considered below middle-class. This child's family has actually experienced the loss of their home due to job loss and divorce but was taken in by other family members. Even this child has not experienced the true meaning of homelessness. Another child in this group has just been recently diagnosed with a physically, debilitating disease. At the present she is under the

care of multiple world-class doctors who are currently working on a course of treatment to manage this illness. Not to diminish the nightmare that this family has been living but for the sake of the community I am trying to portray, because this family has the luxury of possessing educated parents with excellent healthcare benefits, her future is not quite as bleak as a child whose only medical care is provided by social services. At the present, physically, she is coping very well with this illness. Unfortunately, she is not coping as well emotionally as she is physically. We will discuss more of the group's perspective on this potential tragedy in later chapters. Finally, I chose this particular group because of the rapport that we have established over the last several years. I began reading aloud to this group in their Kindergarten year. I then began working closely with them during their second through fourth grade years on multiple technology projects for which they have won several awards. Basically, this group and I have shared books, stories, opinions, ideas, triumphs, and failures with each other for the last five years.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, my small reading community is made of fifth grade students who have tracked together within the school since kindergarten. They are very comfortable with each other, often to the point of sibling rivalry. They are very adept at reading each other's physical and emotional signals and are very protective of each other. After learning about the illness of the student in their group, they are careful to provide her with physical and emotional support. These students are also very competitive, academically as well as physically. They are also very competitive when it comes to the attention of the teacher. I found this also to be true when we are together as a reading community. They beg to take turns reading aloud, to share their thoughts and reflections, and to share their formal responses. They delight in their own narratives. This

is a very gregarious, confident, and likable group, although sometimes self-centered. These students remind me a lot of myself when I was their age. Even though I will be introducing each child in this chapter, I will revisit some of this information based upon their responses to particular picturebooks, the connection between their lived experience and the experiences of the fictional characters, and the depth of their reaction, positive as well as negative, to a story. I will also examine their creative expression in the culminating activity based upon what beliefs, attitudes, and personal histories they bring to the group.

Fallon.

> "My name is Junie B. Jones. The B stands for Beatrice. Except I don't like Beatrice. I just like B and that's all." (From *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus,* Barbara Park)

Fallon is a precocious eleven year old with whom I have had a connection since she was in kindergarten. Her mother, a media specialist, is a colleague. Her father works for one of the large manufacturers in our area. She has a younger sister and enjoys her status as the oldest. Her family spends quite a lot of time together and goes on numerous vacations. Just since our small reading has formed, Fallon has been to Disney World twice and on a cruise. I hear there is another cruise planned for Spring Break. She is also very close to her grandparents and spends a lot of time with both. Even though her parents by no means are the most affluent in our reading group, Fallon exhibits the personality of a child who has never worried about social or financial status. With such parental devotion, one would think that she would act spoiled but actually she displays an inner confidence that is appealing to her teachers and her peers.

Fallon is a cross between the children's book character, Junie B. Jones and Disney's latest television character, Hannah Montana. Fallon is determined to be a movie star and participates in all of the extracurricular activities necessary to help her prepare for her career. I was invited to one of her thespian efforts this summer and she was one of the standouts in the production. Fortunately, she is not the product of stage parents. They are willing to pay for her activities but they in no way push her towards show business. Fallon never meets a stranger and is very comfortable giving her opinions and feels confident that one has been waiting a lifetime just to hear what she has to say. Even though her opinions are colored by her age, eternal optimism, and self-confidence, she can be quite insightful.

Charlie.

> Walter lay back and smiled. "I like it here." (From *Just a Dream,* Chris Van Allsburg)

Charlie is one of the sensitive thinkers in the group. He reads everything and enjoys book characters from Harry Potter to Captain Underpants. He spends time looking up obscure facts because he is interested. He is very scientific and mathematical. He enjoys the knowledge that he is both a gifted student and athlete. I would have to say that because of Charlie's IQ, his physical abilities, and his sensitivity to his peers, he is the most well-rounded of the group. His mother is an intellectual scholar who teachers AP English/literature at our local high school and his father is an award-winning baseball coach at the same school. Charlie likes thinking of himself more of a scholar than athlete. When I asked Charlie whether he thought he would receive a college scholarship for academics or athletics, he responded, "Academics, of course!"

Charlie enjoys a rather interesting relationship with his peers. Even though he is very bright and nice looking, he is not as charismatic as some of the other boys in the group, as a result, he does not receive the female attention the others boys enjoy. However, he can hold his own when discussing with the girls the finer details of the latest vampire craze thus making him popular at the lunch table. His ability on the kickball and soccer field makes him popular with the boys at recess. Because of a healthy dose of self-confidence, he is quite content being well liked without feeling the need to be the leader of the group. Charlie has always been a favorite with his teachers.

Hillary.

> Then, smiling kindly, he added, "And oh, my sister, but she is beautiful."
> (From *The Rough Faced Girl*, Rafe Martin)

Hillary is the socialite of our reading community. She has been at the center of Charlie's unrequited love for years. Because she is so nice, she has been able to thwart his attentions without hurting his feelings. Hillary is one of the peacemakers in the group and is more than willing to help solve conflict between her peers. She has a way of letting Fallon know that she has talked too much without seeming condescending or bossy. She also seems to be the glue that connects the group together when factions begin to form. Hillary can at times be quite the drama queen and enjoys the attention brought to her by the occasional splinter, ailment, or even broken heart. Last year she choked in the lunchroom and was rescued by an observant dad visiting for lunch. She enjoyed her celebrity status and the personal attention of her group for days. She is a beautiful girl who has already learned how to use this knowledge to its fullest advantage.

Hillary is the youngest of three girls. Hillary often seems older than her years which I am sure come from having siblings who are both teenagers. Her dad, a lawyer, is

the patriarch of the household. Her mom, who is a beautiful woman both inside and out, works part-time for her husband and she volunteers in my media center two afternoons a week. She drives her children to and from school everyday. From my perspective, Hillary's mother's top priority is her family and the second is to be a productive community member. Hillary is a child who is confident in the fact that she is well loved by both her family and her school community.

Jake.

> For him, dreams were magic chariots pulled through his mind by galloping hues of color. For him, dreaming was a way of life. (From *Appelemando's Dreams,* Patricia Polacco)

Jake is as beautiful a boy as Hillary is a girl. He comes close to being a male version of Hillary. He has a smile that pretty much assures him of open doors and open minds. Because of his quick wit, both students and adults, alike, are drawn to his personality. Jake has won many awards; both academic as well as athletic. His mother is a teacher at my elementary school and his father, a former golf pro, manages one of the larger golf clubs in the area. Jake is the walking replica of his father with his mother's heart. For the first six years of his life, he enjoyed the undivided attention of his parents and paternal grandparents. One would think he would have resented the addition of a little sister to his world but he actually treats her with brotherly affection.

On the surface, one would expect Jake to be self-centered and spoiled, but he actually exhibits sensitivity to his peers and the world around him that is unusual for a child of his age. He enjoys his popularity within his school community without conceit or snobbery. He can be found playing on the playground outside of his social circle if the game looks fun or challenging. One thing to note is that Jake is sensitive to his own

feelings and is easily disappointed and hurt. Therefore, he is particular not to do the same to others. He has often enjoyed being the favorite of a classroom teacher. Before he developed his own afterschool play group, he would often swing by the media center in the afternoons and offer to shut down all of the computers before reporting to his mother's classroom.

Lucy.

> But the Rough-Face Girl had faith in herself and she had courage. (From *The Rough Faced Girl,* Rafe Martin)

Lucy is part of a small percentage of students in my school community. She is biracial. Her mother is white and her father is African-American. Neither of her parents have a college education. At the beginning of our study her father supported the family with a well paying blue collar job. At the time, her mother did not work. Unfortunately, throughout the course of our time together, Lucy's parents divorced and her father was laid off from his job. Lucy and her three siblings, along with their mother were forced to move in with relatives for a brief period of time. Luckily for the family, mother found employment and along with her father's help, were able to find a house that they could afford. Unfortunately for us this house was in another school district so Lucy left us right before our study ended. When we read *A Day's Work* by Eve Bunting and talked about how people often struggle to find jobs, I noticed that Lucy was particularly interested in our read-aloud conversation.

I have known Lucy since she was in Kindergarten. She is quite the extrovert and has many friends. She can often be found at the center of any social group. Lucy held many leadership roles while attending our school. To say that Lucy's departure from the reading group and our school was a major loss would be an understatement. She seemed

to move easily from one social group to the other. Lucy actually had a way about her that seemed to connect all of the social groups together. Even though I noticed a change in her personality during the worst of her family struggles she seemed to regain her vitality and cheerful outlook once stability had returned to her life.

Tina.

> When mama heard we were all in agreement, she handed me Baby Betty, and the doll's eyelashes fluttered. "You are all I want. I don't need anything else!" I cried. "We'll see," said Mama. (From *The All-I'll Ever-Want Christmas Doll,* Patricia C. McKissack)

Tina is the youngest in a family of step-siblings. Her father has children from a previous marriage and she is her mother's only child. Tina has an older high school brother that has been a large influence on her life. Both her parents are in upper management at local industries. Her mother is on our school advisory board. Besides Hillary, she is probably the most affluent of the students in the reading group. Even though one would not call Tina "outgoing" she does not have a problem sharing her opinion in our reading group. She is very bright and does not have to struggle to stay at the top, scholastically. I have worked with her on a few projects where she was willing to take a lesser score in order not to have to redo her work.

Tina is part of a close group of girls. (Lucy was a part of this group before she left our school.) Like Fallon and Hillary, Tina plays a central role in the lives of her family. She also likes to play a central role her social group. I will discuss one particular incident in a later chapter.

Tina is quite informed on popular culture. She knows the latest celebrity gossip and is obsessed with many of the stars that lean towards the gothic style. Recently she came to one of our reading sessions with a fake lip ring and has informed me quite

seriously that she does plan to get a tattoo as soon as she has permission. I do not doubt her determination.

Chip.

> Walter couldn't understand why anyone would want a tree for a present. (From *Just a Dream,* Chris Van Allsburg)

Chip is a new addition to the group. His parents moved to our school district last school year. His father is an administrator at our high school and his mother, a former teacher, chose to stay at home after Chip was born. He has an older brother who is quite brilliant and is very good at sports. Even though Chip is very bright, he would rather be bouncing a basketball than reading a book. He plays basketball, football, baseball, and soccer; depending on the season of the year. He would much rather be considered an athlete over being a scholar.

Chip enjoys the undivided attention of a stay-at-home mom. She spends a good portion of her time making sure that Chip and his brother are able to participate in any sports activity of their choosing. His father is a task master expecting that his boys do their best at all times, especially sports. He attends their practices and games when his own responsibilities do not interfere. Chip is quite the extrovert. He fits easily into this group which is a feat because this group has been together since kindergarten with few additions and subtractions. Of course, Chip has all the right qualifications. He is a handsome, white middle-class boy who is physically and intellectually gifted; much like the rest of the group. Chip is actually a "chip off the old block". He is often quick to give an opinion that very much sounds like a quote from dinnertime conversation. Chip sees everything in black and white, yes or no, and even good or bad. There are no gray areas where he is concerned.

Tommy.

> "I'm youth, I'm joy," Peter answered at a venture, "I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg." (From *Peter Pan*, James Barrie)

I would have to say that Tommy is being raised the most differently from the rest of the group. He and his brother live with only their mom. His maternal grandmother lives next door and takes an active role in their lives. While his father is a part of his life, he is in the military and is has been deployed most of Tommy's life. Tommy is biracial. His father is black and his mother is white. Basically, Tommy and his brother, who are both dark skinned, are being raise by two white women who also work full time. Tommy, who is now eleven, is allowed to stay at home alone after school while his brother attends our school's YMCA afterschool program. Even though I have worked with Tommy for at least five years as a media specialist, it was not until I had the opportunity to get to know him in our reading community did I realize how much his non-traditional lifestyle has influenced his thinking. I say this not as a criticism but rather as a pleasant surprise. I will share more of his story in a later chapter.

Like the other boys in this group, Tommy is a very good looking boy. He has head full of curls and a smile that lights up his entire face. He is very easy going and besides Hillary is the other peacemaker in the group. The additional work that the GT students are required to complete can be overwhelming at times but Tommy does the work without complaint. No matter what he is asked, he smiles and cheerfully completes the task. Because of his good nature and his physical abilities, Tommy can always be found playing with a group on the playground or at the center of a game.

Mario.

> If you know anything about fairy tales, then you know that a hero doesn't appear until the world really needs one. (From *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo)

Mario is as unassuming as he is smart. He is that student you do not even realize is in the room until he opens his mouth and something profound comes out. He is a small boy who speaks in a voice that is even small, almost apologetic. This is not to say that Mario is not confident. He can hold his own in an argument if he finds that the point is worth arguing. He mostly enjoys sitting back and watching the world go by; taking it all in, making decisions and judgments when necessary. Mario is very creative and often thinks in what educators like to term as "outside the box". Mario spent his entire second grade year sporting different paper mustaches which he made from notebook paper. Every time I visited his classroom I was treated to a new design. He was allowed to do this, both by his teacher and his peers. They found it was easy to accept this "quirk" because of his sweet disposition. Mario can be called upon to be a part of all activities in the classroom and has no problem being paired with a girl.

Mario is the oldest of three siblings, ranging from age two to eight. His father is the owner of a trucking company. His mom, who is a nurse worked weekends for most of Mario's life, has recently gone back to work during the school week. Like Tommy, Mario is allowed to go home alone after school but the rest of his siblings who are in school go to a babysitter. Mario explained to the group in one of our sessions that he and his siblings have spent a lot of time at Dad's office recently during days off from school because Mom has been at work. Mario takes his responsibility for his siblings in the same quiet manner as he accepts his school responsibilities.

Maria.

> "My name is Gooney Bird Greene and I want a desk right smack in the middle of the room, because I like to be right smack in the middle of everything."
> (From *Gooney Bird and the Room Mother,* Lois Lowry)

Like Fallon, Maria is quite the extrovert. Also, like Fallon, she always has an opinion on every subject. Unlike Fallon, she is not quite informed on every subject so her opinions are based on either incomplete information or misinformation. She can be found in the middle of everything. Often this "everything" includes petty arguments with the girls in the group. If there is ever a controversy going on based on gossip or hear-say, Maria can often be found in the middle. Maria appears to be more mature both physically and socially than the other girls in the group. All of them seem to be straining towards adolescence with Maria definitely in the lead. Even with this being noted Maria is liked by her peers and continues to be included in social activities. I would venture to guess that the other girls may even secretly envy Maria for her middle-school attitude. It is almost as if they live vicariously through her guts and sophistication.

Maria is the younger of two children. Her half brother (her mother's son) is much older. Her mother is Hispanic and her father is white. Maria is quick to point out that even though her mother works at a hotel, she is not a maid but actually works in the auditor's office. She is also proud of the fact that her dad, retired from active military service, now works on Chinook helicopters and is a part of the Air National Guard. Maria seems to be very aware of her ethnic and social-economic status within the group. In a later chapter, Maria exhibits some insecurity about where she fits within the reading group. She is also very perceptive when we read about how many social groups consider themselves superior to others.

Our reading sessions.

At first most of our reading community sessions took place within the school day. I was fortunate enough to secure permission from the school administration, their GT teacher, and their parents to be a part of their weekly enrichment session. I would go into their classroom each week for an hour-long read-aloud session. One might think that this should be an adequate amount of time to read a twenty-eight page picturebook aloud, examine the illustrations, engage in a complicated conversation, and produce a personal response. It is not. After a few weeks, I realized that an hour did not even come close to creating the reading community that we eventually established. Even though we continued to engage in this routine for the duration of the school term, my reading community and I found a way to extend our time together by meeting after school. We began meeting for an additional two hours one day each week to dig deeper into the meaning of the text.

During this time we explored the text's relevance to our lived experience and its significance to our past, present, and future. We also determined that in order for us to be able to create an imaginative as well as creative response to our readings, we needed to spend even more time in our after-school community. In the end, what resulted was an agreement that we made as a community to set a date to officially end a set of readings and responses. We would then set about creating ways in which to depict the significance of the readings in our own lives. We decided to each select a picturebook that held particular significance to each of us and recreate in our own artistic strength our own imagining of the story. Through the use of music, poetry, visual illustrations, new stories, and even video, we not only rendered our imagining of what the picturebook and its

creators were trying to tell us but also rendered our imaginings of a future built from the critical questions about our past and present.

The picturebooks.

All of the picturebooks that I have selected for this study have been read aloud in recent years to at least one group of students at my school. Each picturebook fosters a series of complicated conversations dependent upon the grade level of the students. Many of the picturebooks that I read aloud are considered "classics". I am not referring to the classics as those books written by the Greek but the stories that are considered "timeless". It is interesting to note that many of these timeless stories introduce notions such as respect, dignity, otherness, hegemony, but many of them depict ideas of gender, racial, and social bias. As I mentioned earlier, one only has to examine fairytales, which are considered as classic, to see how these books provide the basis for conversation on how stories can perpetuate stereotypes and reflect the culture in which it was written.

Another group of picturebooks I read aloud are considered "multicultural". Multicultural literature is defined by Norton (1991) as "[l]iterature about racial and ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority of the United States" (p. 531). I would venture to include not only children from non-white Anglo American cultures but white Anglo American children who live differently from the students with whom I read. According to Norton their intent is to allow children to "[u]nderstand that people who belong to racial and ethnic groups other than theirs are real people, with real feelings, emotions, and needs similar to their own – individual human beings, not stereotypes" (p. 531).

Lastly, many of the picturebooks I read to my students are considered "historical fiction". Basically, these books contain stories set in the past. Many of them actually cross into the multicultural realm because they tell stories of how racism, classism, and sexism have been used throughout history to rationalize many unspeakable events. Norton (1991) explains, "Through the pages of historical fiction, the past becomes alive. Not with just dates, accomplishments, and battles; it is people, famous and unknown" (p. 474). By peering into the past, children often can make sense of their present. Norton states "The thread of people's lives weaves through the past, the present, and into the future" (p. 474). Through our reading and subsequent conversations about classic, multicultural, and historical picturebooks, my students and I are able to see how the threads of these stories weave together with our own stories and bring about an understanding of our past, present, and future.

Challenges of the study.

When one is leading an almost idyllic life why should one have a need to question the status quo? If one is living comfortably within the dominant culture why should there be a need for change? If you find no connection to the atrocities committed in the past and yourself, why dwell on them? If you only see yourself mirrored in the literature that you choose to read, why search for something different? If you are content with your present why is there a need to worry about the future? These are the questions that I found to be the main challenge of my study. The students in my small reading community live in an insulated world where divorce and even death may be a reality, but practices such as slavery, apartheid, persecution, and genocide, and concepts such as immigration, homelessness, and hegemony never even cross their minds. Because most of the students

in my small reading group had never heard of many of these terms or gave them much thought, my pre-reading conversation either took on an introductory tone or was spent allowing the students to share what little they knew. Often their prior knowledge consisted of generalized information "parroted" from dinnertime conversation. As a researcher I had to remember the words of Freire & Macedo (1987) "It is through their own language that they will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture" (p. 151). I took this to mean that it was my responsibility not only as a researcher but as a teacher-librarian to provide the picturebooks and then allow my reading community to find ways to connect the picturebook to their lives; even if this meant a positive or negative connection.

Another challenge that I faced was my own familiarity with my reading community. Because most of them had been in my school since kindergarten (five years), regular visitors to my media center, as well as part of many of my information resource and technology lessons, I brought to my research preconceived ideas about how each of them would react or respond to many of the picturebooks that we read. I recognized this possibility and worked overtime not to single out particular students for specific questions and took their lead as to where the conversation would take us.

The next challenge I faced was the flip-side of the preceding challenge. Because of the great amount of time that my reading community and I had spent together over the years they were very familiar with me. I wondered as a qualitative researcher if my reading community would have been as forthright about their thoughts and feelings if they had worked with someone they did not know as well. This group was more than willing to express every thought that came to mind because they knew what to expect

from me and were willing to take the chance that whatever they said would be validated and not censored. On more than one occasion I wondered if my reading community, based upon our history together, participated so willingly in my study out of their need to please me more than their recognition of my need to study the impact of the picturebook upon them.

The last challenge that I faced in my research was the infrequent schedule of reading sessions as well as the limited number of reading sessions. Even though we met for a total of ten reading sessions, these did not come in a ten week progression. Because of other school requirements, my reading community often had to skip their weekly afternoon Gifted and Talented class, which meant I could not get into their class for our reading session. Our after school sessions were often cancelled because of appointments and other commitments. This infrequent meeting translated into the loss of continuity in our conversation. This meant that I often had to begin a new reading session spending an extra amount of time reviewing picturebooks that we had read in previous sessions in order to segue into a new picturebook. I also worried that because our sessions were infrequent, the students would begin to be bored with the project but this turned out to be a positive factor because they were glad to see me each time I came to their classroom.

Beyond the challenge that our sessions were not on a regular schedule was the fact that ten reading sessions were not nearly enough to delve deeply into the literature. I often found myself moving the group along so that we would be able to explore all of the picturebooks that I had chosen to explore during that session. Basically, there were so many books, so many conversations, and so little time.

Significance of the study.

Children come to school with attitudes, beliefs, and customs intact. I see the manifestation of these attitudes, beliefs, and customs every day in my school even as early as kindergarten. Many parents in an effort to protect their children from the horrors of the past and the injustices that they feel are far removed from their lives of today allow their children to grow up only vaguely aware that a world existed and still exists much different from their own. Federal and state curricular mandates are only a fraction of what should be considered schooling. As educators it is our job to fuse all aspects of learning together, both the formal and the informal curriculum. This is where I contend that the picturebook is the medium in which to bring these two together. Reading carefully selected picturebooks aloud and examining both the text and illustrations through aesthetic and critical lenses fosters the complicated conversations that help students learn about historical events that are not covered in the textbook, help students name the social injustices that take place around them, and help students to envision how they can create a better world for themselves and future generations.

This study, *The Power of the Picturebook: Examining Aesthetics and Critical Literacy for Imagination,* represented the effort to challenge my reading community to imagine a world of possibility for others and themselves by reading picturebooks through the lenses of aesthetics and critical literacy. By examining the picturebook through an aesthetic lens, the reader does not determine whether they like the illustration or the story or use the illustrations to complete the text, rather the reader uses the picturebook, both the text and the illustrations, to make connections between their lived world and the world in which the reader lives. By examining the picturebook through a critical lens, the

reader examines both the text and illustrations in order to question their own perceptions as well as the perceptions of the dominant culture of the past and the present.

Finally the ultimate goal of this study, *The Power of the Picturebook: Examining Aesthetics and Critical Literacy for Imagination,* represented the effort to challenge educators and parents, alike, to consider reading picturebooks aloud, using both the text and the illustrations, to their students and children. Each new encounter with a picturebook provides the opportunity for children to connect their lived experience with that particular story. Each encounter provides the opportunity to celebrate difference. Each encounter brings about a different way of imagining. This could be imagining what the author wants us to see, feel, or understand, imagining alternative realities other than those we already know, imagining worlds far different from our own, imagining the past in order to understand the present, and imagining the possibilities of the future.

Summary.

This study is part of the curriculum studies field. This study contends that even as the formal learning process begins, informal learning never ends. Curriculum theorists consider this flowing together of both formal and informal learning as *currere*. Dennis Sumara (1996) states, "Currere explicitly acknowledges that there can be no fixed or clearly defined boundary between schooling and other lived experiences; events of schooling become extricable from the path of life" (p. 174). To complicate matters even further, informal learning not only takes place outside of the school, it also takes place within the school walls. I find that the analogy that I like best about the way the informal curriculum and the formal curriculum flow together is like the community of the river. The different currents and the organisms that live within do not always all flow together

in one direction. Not only do they not always flow in the same direction, sometimes they do not flow at all. They swirl, they sink, they float, they stop, they even tear apart and become part of other currents and organisms, and, possibly, continue to be no more.

The work of this study sought to use the picturebook as part of the informal learning process to help the reading community to connect their reality to the past, the present, and future. Through the reading of the picturebook and complicated conversation, the reading community would be able to understand their past, question the present, and imagine the future thus breaking away from their idea of what the dominant culture holds as acceptable practice. My research was based upon the assertion of curriculum as a political text. According to Pinar, et al. (2002), "Today no serious curriculum scholar would advance the argument that schools in general and curriculum in particular are politically neutral" (p. 244). Even the picturebook, from fairytales (patriarchy, step-families, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, hegemony, etc.) to realistic fiction (the Holocaust, slavery, homelessness, ecology, etc.), is a site for questions, dialogue, and change.

Like the river community, my reading community at times swirled, sank, floated, and broke apart to become part of other communities. Unlike the river community, my reading community never ceased to exist because even though a member left the group this member took with her to a new community of readers all her history, her questions, and her imaginings. I found that the picturebook could elicit profound responses from my reading community; responses at times that were sensitive, intuitive, insightful, but also indifferent, apathetic, and even superior. It is my hope that through the complicated conversation and creative responses of my reading community, teachers and parents will

see the need to continue to read picturebooks in order to question what society has deemed as acceptable practice. It is also my hope that the reading community as well as teachers and parents will continue to read picturebooks, both the text and illustrations, through an aesthetic as well as critical lens, in order to bring their own attitudes, beliefs, and social structure to the picturebook and then come away with a new sense of what is possible through the imagination.

I believe that this study represents the coming together of the informal curriculum, the attitudes, beliefs, and societal customs that students bring with them to school as well as the attitudes, beliefs, and societal customs they encounter through the act of schooling, and the formal curriculum, as ascribed by state standards and criterion/standardized assessment. The picturebook, both the text and illustrations, can provide the link that connects both the informal and formal curriculum together. By using the picturebook as an accompaniment to the textbook, teachers and parents can bring to life the historical events and societal issues that the textbook only begins to address. The act of examining picturebooks through aesthetic and critical lenses brings together theory and practice in order to possibly bring about societal changes for future generations.

CHAPTER IV

WAYS OF IMAGINING: THE PICTUREBOOKS

> Because the conditions are ripe for it, people today are eager for the new vision and new sensitivities that books may stimulate. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 189)

The purpose of this study was to challenge teachers and parents alike to use culturally and historically diverse picturebooks and complicated conversation with a young reading community in order to question what was accepted in the past and is still accepted in the present in order to imagine the possibilities of the future. By imagining what the author wants us to see, feel, or understand, by imagining alternative realities other than those we already know, by imagining worlds far different from our own, by imagining the past in order to understand and question the present, the future may be a different place. I believe that a twenty-eight page book containing twice as many pictures as words, sometimes no words at all, can awaken the imagination. I also believe that the picturebook has the power to enrich the formal curriculum which seeks to perpetuate the dominant culture.

From the many books that I had available in my library collection, I chose to use books that were inspired by the works of Maxine Greene (1995, 2001) and Dennis Sumara (1996, 2002) and their ideas of ways to imagine. Both Sumara and Greene propose that by imagining the past and the present, one can imagine the possibilities of the future. Sumara (2002) puts it aptly by suggesting “To imagine, then, is to create interpreted bridges between what is held in memory, what currently exists, and is what is predicted about the future” (p. 5).

Picturebooks to Imagine the Past

I laid the foundation of the bridge by choosing the historical picturebooks: *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War* by Yukio Tsuchiya, *The Cats in Krasinski Square* by Karen Hesse, *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark* by Carmen Agra Deedy, and *The Middle Passage* by Tom Feelings. These picturebooks allowed my students to see glimpses of a past that most of them had no connection. Before reading these picturebooks with my reading community I had to realize that glimpsing the past may be murky at best because many of the events of the past are not exactly ones that our world and even our nation can be proud. The Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) guarantee that students as early as first grade will be introduced to the idea of civil rights (Georgia DOE, 2010).

Thanks to GPS and the social studies textbook chosen by our county's curriculum department, my small reading community was well aware of the ideas of liberty, justice, tolerance, and freedom. Each one of them could explain the conflict between Native Americans and Europeans, and Native Americans and westward expansion. My reading group could explain slavery as an institution and its injustices and they could explain the causes of the Civil War. With their fifth grade year almost over, my reading community could even explain the causes of WWI and WWII, the Holocaust, and Japanese Internment.

What my reading community was unable to do was connect these historical events to the life they were leading at the present. The textbook had delivered the facts as its editors had chosen to present them but its attempts to put names, faces, and stories on historical events were isolated to single paragraph insets within the texts. It was in the

gaps left by the textbook that I had chosen to fill with historical picturebooks. It was the historical picturebooks that I chose to read to my small reading community that enabled them to imagine what it was like to be a Jew in Nazi Germany and WWII, a Japanese American during WWII and an African slave, and also to imagine the dilemmas faced by countries who were considered enemies of the United States because enemy or not, these countries also were filled with innocent people and innocent creatures. Greene (1995) states "Literature does not replace historical description, but engagement with it does tap all sorts of circuits in reader consciousness" (p. 186). It was my small reading groups' consciousness that I hoped to tap with picturebooks such as *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War, The Cats in Krasinski Square, The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark,* and *The Middle Passage.*.

All of the books mentioned in the paragraph above have been catalogued as historical fiction except for *The Middle Passage*. Even though each of these picturebooks have been catalogued as works of fiction, they bring to life the places, faces, stories, and emotions of our past that the textbook only describes in a "series of events" (Norton, 1991, p. 509). She goes on to explain "Through the pages of historical fiction, the past becomes alive. It is not just the dates, accomplishments, and battles: it is people, famous and unknown" (p. 475). One would think based upon the titles of these books that these picturebooks are the retelling of true stories. However, many of these books are actually legends, myths, and fictional characters set in a true historical event. According to Hearne (2006) the book *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War* has "[t]urned out to be a legend, and a complex one at that" (para. 29) which would indicate that even though this story is read annually on Japanese radio every year to mark the

anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II and the starving of three of the zoo's favorite animals is a work of fiction. *The Cats in Krasinski Square* is based upon a newspaper article that Hesse (2004) found about "[c]ats outfoxing the Gestapo at the train station in Warsaw during World War II" (Author's Note). Deedy (2000) claims that *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark* is a legend and states "It may be disappointing to the reader as it first was to the author to learn that there is no proof that the story ever occurred" (Author's Note). She goes on to explain "I learned over the years, despite collecting various oral versions of the story, researching documents and works of fiction, I found only unauthenticated references to King Christian's legendary defiance" (Author's Note).

Even though *The Middle Passage* is catalogued as non-fiction, its catalogue designation is Historical Painting not Black History or Biography. Feelings (1995) gives importance to the artwork by explaining "Telling stories through art is both an ancient and modern functional art form that enables an artist to communicate on a large scale to people young and old. I used this form of historical narrative pictures telling a complete story to adults" (Forward). He lets us know that the paintings in this picturebook came from "[f]actual incidents in sequential order, reading some personal accounts by former slave-ship captains, slave traders, and various European historians" and then infused the artwork with the stories of "[a]ll kinds of people, young and old" as they "[v]oluntarily opened up and told me about the joyful and the sorrowful things in their lives" (Forward) instead of one factual accounting of one particular historical event.

Where does the realization that historical fiction is mostly legend, author interpretation, oral tale, and even myth leave the reader who so desperately is trying to

understand the past? According to Sumara (1996) “It seems that the line between fact and fiction cannot be neatly drawn. Without the references to elements of the real world, a literary fiction would be totally meaningless, and a daily life without imaginings would at best dull – likely tolerable” (p. 18). In other words, it is the references to the real world embedded with characters and events from the author’s own imagination that will enable us to take a paragraph from a history textbook and imagine what it would be like to feel shackles on tender skin, hear the cries of starving elephants, see friends being dragged away in the night, and smell the disease-ridden cargo holds of the slave ships. Sumara goes on to explain “When the fictive nature of the text is unmasked, and the reader understands that he or she must work to overcome indeterminacy that has been conditioned by the author, the imagination is invoked” (p. 37).

As a reading community we know when we begin a historical picturebook session that the stories that we are reading are only based upon true events and therefore it is up to us to use our imagination to complete the true events. Greene (1995) reminds “No novelistic reality can ever be complete or wholly coherent; nor can it settle anything. We are left, therefore, with our open questions – about practice, about learning, about educational studies, about community” (p. 187). It will be the questions asked by the reading community as we read the historical picturebooks and when we are done that will bring about a new vision and new sensitivities so that many of the events in our past never happen again.

Picturebooks to Imagine the Present

Immigration and homelessness are only two of the many practices that are accepted by the dominant culture today and only two of the societal issues that are far

from the reality of my reading community. The first two picturebooks, *A Day's Work* and *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, that I chose enabled my reading community to imagine lives that could be happening parallel theirs by children their own age. I chose another picturebook book classified as realistic fiction, *The Lemonade Club* written by Patricia Polacco based upon Greene's explanation of imagining as "a friend of someone else's mind" (1995, p. 145). Norton (1991) discusses realistic fiction, "One of the greatest values of realistic fiction for children is that many realistic stories allow children to identify with characters of their own age who have similar interests and problems" (p. 408). I interpreted the notion of becoming a friend to someone else's mind with the idea of compassion. According to Reynolds (2003) "Compassion is more than the sentimentality of words, notes, and flowers. Compassion is something we do" (p. 48). In the next chapter, I will explain the events within our reading community that necessitated just how dire it was that we read this picturebook and how real the use of compassion became to our group.

Greene (2001) posited the idea of imagining as "alternative realities" (2001, p. 74). I chose the picturebooks, *Just A Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg and *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss in order to help my reading community to imagine realities that may be far different if they do not begin to question the realities that they live today. In the book, *Just A Dream*, which was also illustrated by Van Allsburg, Walter, a self-indulgent boy, discovers through a series of dreams the importance of taking care of the earth. The story itself is a visual treat both through Van Allsburg's use of imagery and the illustrations themselves. It is easy to "see" the action of the story but looking deeper there is more to imagine than just the visual image of the words from the page. Although *Just A Dream* is

considered realistic fiction, *The Lorax* is classified as fantasy. Norton (1991) states "Fantasy is a worthy genre of literature for all children. It challenges the intellect, reveals insights, stimulates the imagination, and nurtures the affective domain" (p. 328). *The Lorax* definitely enriches the imagination by inviting its readers to imagine an alternative reality far from our everyday life.

This story told by the story's villain, the Once-ler, to a small boy, explains what happened to an unspoiled environment after it was used for capital gain. This multifaceted book delves into the notions of capitalism, exploitation, hegemony, waste, pollution, extinction, and renewal. This book, which was written in 1971, the year after the first Earth Day observance, has all the ingredients for a critical conversation about the environment. Imagining a world of Truffula Trees, Swomee-Swans, the Brown Bar-ba-loots, and Humming-Fish who have no voice in the decision making process of their world helps the reader and listeners to imagine the frustration of the powerless. It will be through an eco-critical conversation about the setting of *The Lorax* that students will come to understand that just like the community of creatures in the text, there are many communities in our own country that because of race and/or economic status have very little voice, if any, in the decisions made regarding their local environment and economy.

Sumara (1996) suggests imagining as a way to "go beyond her or his daily lived experience into another lived experience" (p. 85). Even though the realistic picturebook I chose could be considered historical, *Grandmama's Pride* written by Becky Birtha provided my reading community a glimpse into a daily lived experience far from their own. This picturebook about a young black girl in the 1950's took my reading community who had never been excluded from any public place into the segregated

world of bathrooms, restaurants, buses, and even water fountains. Sumara (1996) reminds, “Although we may consider the interaction with a literary fiction imaginary, it is the conditioned imagination, as it co-exists with our other lived experience that can serve as the interruption, the breach, the rupture in the familiar world” (p. 189). Imagining that there are lived worlds where people are not free to choose their paths, where people worry about their next meal, or where people wonder if their lives will be cut short by violence, disease, or natural disaster puts our understanding of our own lived worlds into perspective.

I was inspired to choose the next picturebook, *Voices in the Park* written by Anthony Browne by the work of Sumara (2002) when he suggested imagining as a way to create for students an opportunity for “interpretations of themselves” (p. 29). This book serves to remind us that there are many different kinds of people in the world who represent different classes, races, genders, and socioeconomic levels. It also reminds us that we look at “others” through lenses that are colored by class, race, gender, and socioeconomic level. Lastly, it reminds us that we are all part of the notion of “different kinds of people.” Sumara (2002) affirms, “After all, the most significant event that takes place in one’s life is learning about one’s place in the social, cultural and ecological order of things” (p. 54). Even though they are just children, the students who visit my media center are already trying to find their place in the order of things as it pertains to their childhood. They are trying to figure out where they fit among their peers, their teachers, their community, and even in their own minds. Even though the majority of this group is very much alike, as a whole, they still represent different cultures, socio-economic levels, and beliefs.

Stories such as *Voices in the Park* that illustrate multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and socioeconomics help the reader to imagine how people considered "other" see the reader. According to Watkins (in Reynolds & Weber, 2004), "Questioning and rejecting normative knowledge that supports oppression or that places value on the elite rather than on ordinary people can be taught consciously, ... , or it can be learned from our contexts" (p. 160). Brown's multiple tellings of a trip to the park is a perfect example of how one can view one's world based upon the contexts of one's life.

Picturebooks to Imagine the Future

> Never again would they question the importance of dreams. (*Appelemando's Dreams* by Patricia Polacco)

Ultimately, all of the picturebooks, from the past and the present, that had been chosen thus far laid the foundation and built the bridge that lead to enabling my reading community to imagine the possibility of a better future for themselves and their children. For the last section, I chose the picturebooks *The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland, *Appelemando's Dreams* by Patricia Polacco, and *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* by Eve Bunting. All of these picturebooks had the potential for the reading community to create what Karen Gallas (2003) explains as "a new and better vision of the world" (p. 169).

The Lotus Seed is catalogued as historical fiction. Like the historical fiction mentioned in a previous paragraph, this picturebook is a fictional account of true events. In the Author's note, Garland (1993) gives a basic accounting of Vietnam's history beginning with centuries of imperial rule, colonization by the French, an independence movement by Ho Chi Minh, and a civil war between the north and the south; ending with

the defeat of the south. Garland closes the book with the explanation that millions of South Vietnamese immigrated to the United States "[l]eaving behind their homes, possessions, families, and friends" (Author's Note) during the civil war. One may wonder how a historical picturebook that tells of such loss: an emperor's kingdom, a country's independence, a spouse, a home, and even a single treasured possession can inspire one to imagine the possibilities of a better future. It is at the darkest part of the story that one finds the possibilities because from out of the mud grew a flower of life and hope which leads us to imagine what possibilities can come from despair.

Appelemando's Dreams is beautiful picturebook that cautions the reader as to what happens when people refuse to believe in the ability to dream. This book that has been catalogued as fiction might come close to being considered fantasy because of the boy's ability to bring his dreams to life and his friends' ability to see his dreams. Then one realizes what all is possible when we give ourselves over to our dreams.

Compared to many of the picturebooks that I read with my reading community, *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust* is probably the most diminutive in size but has one of the most emotional impacts on its readers. Stephen Gammell's black and white illustrations serve to further the concept of the allegory and its message. Donna Norton (1991) explains the use of allegory as "[c]haracters representing goodness of wisdom must confront and overcome characters of evil or foolishness" (p.301). This book reminds all of us the grim consequences when a community turns its back upon those in need.

The Heart of the Picturebook: Messages of Possibility

Somehow, I feel that instead of choosing these particular fourteen picturebooks, they somehow chose my reading community and me. I actually read several more books in addition to the fourteen discussed in this dissertation, but it was the fourteen discussed here that seem to ignite the imagination of the group. What is interesting to note is that after reading and discussing these picturebooks together, we found a common thread between all of them. This thread was the notion of possibility.

Common sense would tell one that picturebooks are supposed to have "happy" endings because, after all, they are for children. Critically, one must ask if picturebooks telling the story of the millions of slaves who were forcibly brought to the United States should have a happy ending, if picturebooks telling the story of the millions of Jews that died in the Holocaust should have a happy ending, if picturebooks telling the story of the thousands of Japanese Americans who were sent to internment camps during WWII should have a happy ending, if picturebooks telling the story of the millions of people who risk their lives to come to the United States in order to live in poverty should have a happy ending, if picturebooks telling the story of the people who are displaced from their homes each year will have a happy ending, or if picturebooks telling the story of the millions people who are dying with cancer will have a happy ending? Actually, what my reading community and I found in these picturebooks was not about the "guaranteed" picturebook happy ending but hope for the possibility of happier endings in the future.

How can the message of possibility come from such disturbing stories? One has to realize that it is in the imagining of the events of these stories that one strives to keep these events from ever happening again. One must also realize that it might be in the

silences and the lack of the search that allows injustices to take place. Stories of the past seem to have a way of affecting stories of the present and the future. Each of the fourteen books that found their way into the hearts and minds of my reading community enabled us to imagine a world in the future that did not make the same mistakes as the past.

In the forward of the book *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War,* the book critic Chieko Akiyama explains that he has spent the last two decades reading this book aloud to many audiences in hopes that people would come to "[r]ealize the sorrow, misery, horror, and foolishness of war" (as cited in Tsuchiya, 1988, Forward). He states "I hope this book will be read throughout the world and that seeds of peace and war prevention will be sown. I hope those seeds will soon bud, blossom, and bear fine fruit" (Forward).

After reading *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, one is lead to realize that this story is ultimately about freedom; that any act no matter how large or small that challenges the hegemony of those in power is significant. According to Freire (2000) "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (p. 47).

In *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark,* Deedy (2000) states "Yet the legend grows only stronger. Why? Perhaps because we need it. The allegory of the yellow star used by the Nazis to divide and shame became in this legend a symbol of unity and hope. It is a story that should be told" (Author's Note). All of the stories about the atrocities committed against innocent people in our past need to be told, again and again. They never need to be forgotten. We also need to hear the stories of how

brave men and women fought against the violence of the Nazi's, again and again. We also need to hear the stories of how one nation came together as a community when other nations did not, again and again. Bravery never needs to be forgotten.

Tom Feelings (1995) tells about the possibilities of his book *The Middle Passage,* "It is almost twenty years later. I have finished this long 'psychological and spiritual journey back in order to move forward' with the completion of the last painting of *The Middle Passage* – a story that has changed me forever" (p. 4) He lets the reader know that no matter what has happened in the past, "As the blues, jazz, and spirituals teach, one must embrace all of life, both its pain and joy, creatively" (p. 4).

A Day's Work sends the message that while we all struggle; choosing to tell the truth influences not only the present but the future. At one time or another, we have all been faced with the dilemma of whether to tell the truth or to lie. Realistically, we know that our students will also be faced with this same dilemma. Realistically, we also know that just as it was ultimately up to us to decide whether we were to tell the truth or lie, it will be ultimately up to our children to decide, as well. We can only provide our students with stories and examples of what comes from telling the truth. Noddings (as cited in Ayers & Miller, 1998) warns "[e]arly exposure to stories of great emotional power has not been often followed up either by stories from the other side or by critical discussion" (p. 164). Basically, Noddings is reminding us that as teachers we need to provide multiple perspectives on moral dilemmas as well as conversation about the struggle.

The statement made by the boy in the last passage from the book, *Fly Away Home*, sums up the message of the entire story:

> "*Sometimes I want to cry. I think Dad and I will be here forever. Then I remember the bird. It took awhile, but the door opened. And when the bird left, when it flew free, I know it was singing."*

My reading community and I discussed that just like the story, opportunities come along and doors open as long as one is willing to hope and imagine. I, too, continue to have hope; when opportunities and doors open for the students in my reading community as well as all the students who come through the door of my media center, they, too, will choose to fly free.

Stories about people with cancer do not always have the same happy endings as *The Lemonade Club*. This picturebook is not only about one cancer survivor but two. The happy ending is not what makes this remarkable picturebook about hope but the whole cast of characters that are willing to struggle along side the two who have no idea what the future may bring. Noddings (as cited in Ayers & Miller, 1998) explains "But at the bottom, I cannot be wrong in choosing a way of life characterized by care, and it is that sensibility that we must be courageous enough to develop in the young"
(p. 165)

Both the picturebooks, *Just A Dream* and *The Lorax* end with a change of heart by both of the main characters in the story. The boy in *Just A Dream* sees the possible consequences of his actions and chooses to change before it is too late. The Once-ler in *The Lorax* witnesses, first hand, the consequences of his actions and tells the boy in the story that by not making the same mistakes that he made the world may renew itself and become whole again. These ecological stories remind us that although many of the earth's resources have been lost from our disregard and greed, it is never too late to

protect what is left. These stories also remind us that the earth has this marvelous capacity to renew itself if we would only take the "seeds" we have been given and plant them in as many places as possible.

The picturebook *Grandmama's Pride* is about the struggle for all people to be treated equally. Birtha (2005) states, "When Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama because she would not give up her seat on the bus to white rider, the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led black citizens in refusing to ride the racially segregated city buses. After more than a year, they won the right to sit where they chose" (Author's Note). Along with hope, this book is about triumph. It is about the triumph that can come when people stand together for the rights and freedoms that naturally should have been theirs.

The last statement in *Voices in the Park* is punctuated with a question mark instead of a period. Charlie, the boy in the story, states, *"Maybe Smudge will be there next time?"* This leads the reader to understand that while Charlie is hopeful, he is filled with some doubt. Charlie has not had a lot of practice in the art of trusting that someone will care about his feelings. He has not had a lot of practice in trusting someone who he was taught to consider as "other". bell hooks (2003) states:

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (p. 197)

Charlie, like all of us, needs to move through his fear and not be afraid to hope. It is in the hoping that we find the courage to reach out to the rest of the world.

The message of the book *The Lotus Seed* is found in the two words in its title. One only has to look at paintings and photographs to recognize that the lotus flower is a thing of beauty. The lotus flower has particular significance and symbolic meaning in many cultures. It symbolizes "[p]urity, beauty, majesty, grace, fertility, wealth, richness, knowledge and serenity" (The Flower Expert, 2009, para. 1). Seeds have been used symbolically in stories and parables for thousands of years. One only has to consider the importance of a seed to recognize that without a seed of some form; life could not be continued. What is remarkable about the lotus seed is that it can lay dormant for many years only to grow from the depths of the mud into an object of beauty. What is also remarkable is that a seed planted from a story read and discussed with our students can lay dormant for years only to grow from the depths of prejudice, bigotry, greed, dominance, and even apathy into an object of tolerance, caring, and even activism.

Patricia Polacco states about her book, *Appelemando's Dreams,* "In the story's surprising but happy ending, the message of "the importance of dreams" is revealed. A book for children and adults alike, *Appelemando's Dreams* teaches the reader not to let go of his dreams, unless it is for the world to see" (retrieved from
(Polacco, n.d., para. 1) In the story the only way the children could be saved was for Appelemando to reveal his dreams to the world. Think of the possibilities for the future, if we could instill in our children the courage to show their dreams to the world.

When regarding the book, *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, one has to ask how a diminutive black and white picturebook using an allegory of forest animals to tell of a time in history when a group of people was systematically selected, taken away, and killed while others turned their backs can even begin to motivate one to

imagine anything other than shock, rage, and despair. As with most allegories, it is the deeper lesson of this picturebook where one finds the possibilities. Through the eyes of the lone little rabbit, the reader sees the horrifying consequences when groups of people do not take care of each other. More importantly, the reader sees that even though the past cannot be changed, it is never too late to begin questioning the practices of racism, prejudice, stereotyping, and apathy.

At the heart of the fourteen picturebooks discussed in this section the reader finds words of possibility. Words like seed, freedom, unity, joy, truth, opportunity, care, renewal, triumph, trust, rebirth, and ultimately, hope. Each picturebook in its unique way brings to life struggles from the past and struggles of the present. They each encourage the readers to dig deep within the soul of the story and find the message hidden within. Sometimes the message is to never forget the atrocities that humans have inflicted upon other humans in the past, sometimes the message is to question the societal practices and abuse that continue to happen in today's world, and sometimes the message is to imagine the possibilities when one dares to care and to dream. Finally, each picturebook encourages the readers to dig deep within their own souls to find the courage to bring about the changes necessary to make the world a better place for many more generations of readers.

CHAPTER V

WAYS OF IMAGINING: READER RESPONSE TO PICTUREBOOKS

Ways of Imagining: The Past

Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War by Yukio Tsuchiya, Translated by Tomoko Tsuchiya Dykes, Illustrated by Ted Lewin

> Building a world without wars has been the greatest human ideal throughout history. Unfortunately, it has never been accomplished. (Akiyama, as cited in Tsuchiya, 1988, Forward)

One's initial reaction while reading about the devastating events that took place during World War II at the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo, Japan to the many creatures, namely three of the zoo's famous elephants, is shock and disbelief; but then comes the grief. In fact the first time I read *Faithful Elephants* I was alone in my office. Before the end of the story I could not help but weep for not only the innocent animals that had been destroyed through during this particular war but all of the innocent lives, both human and animal, through the centuries that have been destroyed as the result of all wars. Logically, I understood that euthanizing the animals was necessary in order to keep them from escaping and inflicting harm on Tokyo's citizens and even on themselves but emotionally the idea was almost more than I could bear. It would be several years before I decided to read this story to my reading communities not because I did not think that it was not relevant or even too emotional but because I was not sure that I could read it aloud with my own emotions intact.

Faithful Elephants begins with the staff at the Ueno Zoo making plans to euthanize the animals that were considered too dangerous or too big to move due to the bombing attacks that were taking place on Tokyo. When it comes time to euthanize the elephants, the zookeepers find that there is no way to humanely complete this task. All

efforts fail. It is decided that the only way to end the elephants' lives is to starve them to death. After much emotional struggle the zookeepers begin the long vigil of waiting for the elephants to die one by one. After much begging and pleading by the last two elephants, the zookeepers find that the only way not to give in to the elephants' attempts to get their attention is to turn their backs on them. The book ends when the last two elephant are found dead against the cage bars. They had been trying to do one last trick in order to earn a treat as they died.

The reading group's reaction to *Faithful Elephants* was very similar to mine. Many of them were shocked and angry that something that horrible could happen to innocent animals and many of them were moved to tears. We then proceeded to talk about what plans communities have for their zoos and aquariums in case of natural disasters and even war. Several of the students begged to immediately go to the Internet and see what happened to the animals in the zoos and aquariums during Hurricane Katrina. I redirected our focus back to the picturebook, *Faithful Elephants*, by asking the group to make a connection between this story and what they know about Japanese involvement in WWII from their Social Studies textbook.

Conversation with Mario and Fallon

> **Peggy:** Tell me what you know from your Social Studies book about how the United States became involved in World War II.
> **Mario:** I know that we didn't really want to be in the war until the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.
> **Peggy:** Why not?
> **Mario:** It was because isolationism. We learned that word this year. We were tired after WWI and didn't want to get involved in war again. So when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor we had to get involved.
> **Peggy:** Why did the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor?
> **Mario:** Because they could get to Hawaii real fast and fly out fast . . . .

Fallon, who had during this exchange with Mario continually waved her hand to talk, broke in to our conversation.

Fallon: They were mad at the United States for something . . . .
Mario: They were upset about the United States warning them not to try to take over South East Asia and the islands close to them. They wanted to stop us before we could stop them.
Fallon: I told you they were mad . . . . but it was also because Japan was mad the United States for cutting off their trade.
Peggy: Do you think it is ever right for a country to be aggressive towards another country just because they are "mad" at the other country?
Fallon: Not unless that other country did something really bad to yours.
Mario: In the case of Japan, I think that Japan was wrong for trying to expand its power in Asia and to bomb Pearl Harbor.
Peggy: In the case of the United States declaring war on Japan?
Fallon: We were right to declare war on Japan because they attacked us first!
Peggy: What about the use of the atomic bomb?
Fallon: We needed them to surrender and after the second bomb, they did.
Peggy: But was an atomic bomb the answer?
Fallon: Yes. We needed to show that world that nobody should mess with us!
Peggy: Did you all discuss this in your Social Studies class?
Mario: The facts stuff we did but not about the right and wrong stuff.
Fallon: I don't know how but I just know about the right and wrong stuff.

Discussion about the book, *Faithful Elephants*

Peggy: When you were discussing the United States initial involvement in World War II and the dropping of the atomic bomb, did you ever discuss the impact that war has on regular people?
Mario: No. We just talked about the facts
Peggy: Have you ever thought about the impact that World War II had on both regular US citizens as well as regular Japanese citizens?
Fallon: I think if the regular Japanese citizens agreed that their country should take over other countries then what happens to them is part of war.
Peggy: Even for the Japanese children?
Mario: I think it is very sad what impact war has on children. They don't ask for their parents to have certain beliefs.
Peggy: What about the animals in the zoos like in the book *Faithful Elephants*?
Mario: That makes me sad as well that there are children **and** animals that have to suffer just because of war.
Peggy: I know that this year you all have been studying all of the wars the United States has been involved since the Civil War. Were any of your classroom discussions about how theses wars affected the children?
Fallon: Not really. I never really thought about how war takes away homes and places like zoos until we started reading these picturebooks.

> **Mario:** The social studies book has these little one page stories in them but not like these picturebooks.

Mario who is a lot more sensitive than Fallon, was quite affected by the picturebook, *Faithful Elephants*. Fallon was more interested in the idea of the United States justification for declaring war and using the atomic bomb. Though she seemed visibly shaken about the story of how the two elephants finally were euthanized at the Ueno Zoo, she basically took it all in stride that tragedy is an unavoidable part of war. The rest of the reading community was very touched by the story but were be able to disconnect from the story, like Fallon, because it did not happen to them personally.

> ***The Cats in Krasinski Square*** **Written by Karen Hesse and Illustrated by Wendy Watson**
>
> The cats come from the cracks in the Wall, the dark corners, the openings in the rubble. (*The Cats in Krasinski Square*, Hesse, 2004)

A book like *The Cats in Krasinski Square* read at face value is historical fiction that has the potential to delight its readers based solely on trickery. On the surface it is a story about good overcoming evil. On a critical level, it represents the suffering, despair, bravery, tenacity, and ingenuity of a group of people. The story opens as a young girl tells the cats who go in out of the Warsaw Ghetto walls that she has no food to spare for them. She then tells us, the readers, that she is fortunate because even though she is Jewish she bears the look and mannerisms of a "non-Jewish 'white'" (Hesse, 2004, Author's Note) and has escaped the Ghetto. As the book proceeds, the young girl explains that her brave sister and friends plan to smuggle food into the Ghetto. The young girl plays her own part in this plan. Because of her relationship with the cats, she knows all of the openings in the walls where food can be placed. Unfortunately, the plan is

almost foiled because the Gestapo had learned of the plan. After another visit to her friends, the cats, the young girl devises a plan that will confuse the dogs that will be waiting for the smugglers at the train station. The story explodes in a frenzy of cats, dogs, people, and suitcases filled with bread with the next page letting us know that both the cats and the smugglers have escaped unharmed and the smuggled food has vanished into the Ghetto. The story ends with the young girl holding a cat while looking at the shadow of the Ghetto in the background of the page.

Furthering the discussion in an earlier section about historical fiction, Hesse explains on the last page of the book how this fictional story was based upon an article she read some years before. In her author's note, she described how she "[c]ouldn't get the story out of my mind, so I went in search of accounts of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Jewish Resistance in Poland" (Hesse, 2004, Author's Note). During her research she found documents, testimonies, correspondence, literature, and works of art centering on the Warsaw Ghetto. By researching the Ringelblum archives and creating a character inspired by the book, *I Remember Nothing More* (Szwajgre, 1991 as cited in Hesse, 2004, Author's Note), Hesse united her interpretation of one event of many in the Jewish resistance to the Nazi occupation of Warsaw with the first person accounts of the people who lived through this time. Hesse took on the task of what Young (2000) expressed as:

> Such history necessarily integrates both the contingent truth's of the historian's narrative and the fact of the victims memory, both deep and common. In this kind of multi-vocal history, no single, overarching meaning emerges unchallenged; instead, narrative and counter-narrative generate frisson of meaning in their exchange, in the working through process they now mutually reinforce. (p. 15)

Basically, Hesse became a historiographer of reality as well as memory

Hesse and the book's illustrator, Wendy Watson, navigated the fine lines between what Young (2000) explained "[a]s a process (what gets told and what gets imagined) it makes visible the space between what gets told and what gets heard, what gets heard and what gets seen" (p. 23). Watson told her own story through the use of watercolor and the ever-present ghetto in the background of the pages. In Young's words, "Words tell one story, images another" (p. 22). Hesse used text to retell an account of a historical event and Watson used images to help the reader see that the Warsaw Ghetto was always looming in the background of the lives of those who were there.

These words "And the music from the merry-go-round floats in the air, rising, tinsel-bright, above Krasinski Square." are from the last page of the story in the book *The Cats in Krasinski Square* (Hesse, 2004). They exemplify the reason why Hesse chose to write this book. They exemplify why children need books such as this one as a beginning for conversation about the past. Hesse chose to end the book by reminding the reader that for all the unspeakable horrors that were going on behind the Ghetto wall, on the "free" side of the wall life for many, life was going on as usual. Watson chose to illustrate this page with the ghetto in the background and the merry-go-round trying to shine in front, but never able to actually cover over the ghetto. The narrator of the story is standing in the foreground observing this scene as she holds a cat, the expression on her face, a mixture of sadness and longing.

Hidden within the last page of this text and its illustration is a lesson for generations to come. What Hesse and Watson are trying to reveal is that just as the Warsaw Ghetto continued to loom in the background of the story, the events of the

Holocaust and many other acts of violence and discrimination will always loom in the background of our lives. We need not forget that even though we now live on the free side of the wall and try to pretend that life goes on as usual, we cannot forget the ones who live on the other side of the wall. We must remember that no matter how loud we play the music or how brightly our merry-go-round shines, we cannot drown-out or shine-over, the cries of the people who have suffered the darkness of slavery, Nazi Germany, Apartheid, discrimination, and terrorism.

Conversation with Chip and Tina

> **Peggy:** Tell me what you know from your social studies book about Hitler and World War II.
> **Chip:** We learned that after World War I, Germany was very poor. They were basically in a depression because they had to pay a lot of money back to other countries for the damage they did.
> **Tina:** (*adding to Chip's discussion*) Adolf Hitler came along and said that he had a plan to help the country out of their mess.
> **Chip:** Hitler convinced people that the Jewish people were causing the economic depression, too.
> **Peggy:** What happened next?
> **Chip:** Hitler became the leader and started arresting and putting Jewish people in concentration camps and attacking other European countries and arresting their Jews as well.
> **Tina:** He also started attacking and taking over all of the countries in Europe. This was before the United States became involved.
> **Peggy:** That's right. Mario explained why the U.S. did not want to get involved. Do you think it is ever right to see something bad happening to others and not get involved.
> **Chip:** Do you mean friends or countries?
> **Peggy:** Either.
> **Chip:** Well, I think it would be easier to get involved if your friend needs you but if a country needs the help of another country that is more difficult.
> **Peggy:** Why?
> **Tina:** Because it's a bigger deal. You have to get permission from the government and it costs money and it costs lives. In the case of WWII, we had already spent a lot of money and lives on it.
> **Peggy:** Too big of a deal to turn our backs on millions of people who were put in concentration camps and ghettos just because of their beliefs?
> **Tina:** But it wasn't affecting us.
> **Peggy:** Not yet anyway. . . .

Discussion on *The Cats in Krasinski Square*

Peggy: Speaking of people helping people. What do you think about the story in *The Cats in Krasinski Square* where the people on the free side of the Warsaw Ghetto helped the people on the inside?
Tina: I think it is very cool and very brave.
Chip: Yeah, especially because the girl and her sister could possibly get caught and they were Jewish, too.
Peggy: Yes, that was a major risk for someone who should have been thankful not to be identified as a Jew. To think that you are home free but you risk you life anyway.
Peggy: Would you call the girl in the story a hero?
Tina: Definitely. She risked everything.
Chip: She was very brave and very smart to trick the soldiers by using the cats.
Peggy: Do you think that by risking ridicule when you stand up for someone in your class would make you a hero?
Chip: Not a famous hero but I guess a sort of hero.

Peggy: Let's look at the last illustration in the story. Describe the three main features of the scene.
Tina: I see the girl holding a cat. I see a merry-go-round. I see the Ghetto in the background.
Chip: It looks like it is almost night.
Peggy: Where is the girl looking?
Tina: At the merry-go-round.
Peggy: Illustrators often tell their own story to compliment the text by their use of color and shading. Tell me what Wendy Watson was trying to say.
Tina: That fun things are continuing to happen even though sad things are behind the wall.
Chip: Maybe the merry-go-round means that maybe good things are coming soon.
Peggy: Look at the expression on the girl's face.
Tina: She looks sad. Almost as if she wishes that she could go and have a good time but she can't because she is Jewish and her friends behind the wall can't go and have a good time.
Peggy: People have to grow up too fast during wartime, don't they?
Chip: Yes, it is like she probably never got to have any fun because of the war.
Peggy: Think about the people behind the wall. They could not even see the merry-go-round much less wish they could ride on it.
Chip: The picture kind of looks like it doesn't matter what the people on the outside of the Ghetto do, the people behind the wall of the Ghetto will be always be there.
Peggy: Maybe this could be a way to say that the memory of what was done to the Jewish people by the Nazi's will always be there.

Even though Tina and Chip could not be considered the most sensitive members in our reading community, they both exhibited a measure of sensitivity to the picturebooks that we read about slavery and the Holocaust.

***The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark* Written by Carmen Agra Deedy and Illustrated by Henri Sørensen**

> Leaning forward, King Christian said evenly, "Then be prepared to shoot the king – for I will be that soldier." (*The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark,* Deedy, 2000)

The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark continues the theme of bravery, ingenuity, and solidarity outwitting the violence of war. In Deedy's retelling of the legend of *The Yellow Star*, King Christian of Denmark takes responsibility to protect all of the Danish citizens, no matter their beliefs, by choosing to wear a yellow star upon his clothing thus signaling to all of his people that they too should wear the yellow star. Because every citizen, Jew and non-Jew, is wearing the yellow star, the Nazi's are unable to separate one group from the other and as a result the vast majority of the Danish Jews are saved from the same fate as many of their fellow believers in other countries. At the beginning of the picturebook, Deedy tells the reader that although there are "Tall Danes, stout Danes, old Danes, silly Danes, cranky Danes and even some Great Danes. But no matter how different from each other they seemed, the Danes held one thing in common: all were loyal subjects of their beloved King Christian" (Deedy, 2000). The reader learns that the king has earned the devotion of his people because of his own compassion, bravery, ingenuity, and wisdom when faced with life and death consequences for his people and himself.

In the Author's Note of *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark,* Deedy (2000) tells the reader that even though the story is only a legend, her research has uncovered facts about Denmark during the Nazi occupation during World War II. She states that she "[l]earned of many facts that in their own right were as powerful as the legend itself" (Author's Note). The two facts that stand out among all the others are "Among the Nazi-occupied countries, only Denmark rescued the overwhelming majority of its Jews" and that "Of the almost 500 Jews deported to Theresienstadt, all but 51 survived due in large part to the Danish government's intercession on their behalf" (Author's Note). Deedy goes on to speculate:

> And what if we could follow the example today against violations of human rights? What if the good and strong people of the world stood shoulder to shoulder, crowding streets and filling the squares, saying 'You cannot do this injustice to our sisters and brothers, or you must do it to us as well.' What if? (Author's Note)

It was the "what if" questions that served as the foundation for our reading group discussion.

Conversation with Maria and Lucy

Peggy: Based upon what we have been discussing about the Holocaust and how communities and even countries turned their backs on the plight of the European Jews, how is the picturebook, *The Yellow Star,* different?
Maria: The Danish king and the people stood in unity against the Nazis.
Lucy: When the Nazis said that all Jews had to wear a yellow star to indicate that they were Jewish, the king, and then the rest of the people, who were not Jews, all wore the yellow star.
Maria: The Nazis couldn't tell who was who.
Peggy: How is this story like *The Cats in Krasinski Square* and how is it different?
Maria: In the *Cats* book, it appeared that only a handful of Jewish sympathizers or maybe even Jews that had escaped the Ghetto were brave enough to help.

Lucy: Yeah, and they helped them by smuggling food with the help of the cats. They did not help them in front of everyone.
Peggy: And the Danes in *The Yellow Star* . . . ?
Lucy: They supported the Jewish people out in the open. Following the lead of their king, all the Danes began to wear the yellow star.
Peggy: Did this make them any better than the ones who were helping in secret?
Lucy: I wouldn't say that it made them any better. They had the support of the king and all worked together.
Maria: It was kind of like they all would die together if necessary, even the king.
Lucy: The little girl and her friends in the *Cats* book didn't have the support of a king and the whole town. They only did what they could do.
Peggy: There are at least two messages that we can take from the connections between *The Cats in Krasinski Square* and *The Yellow Star.*
Lucy: I think one message is that we need to be willing to help each other –in secret or out in the open.
Peggy: Yes . . . . and . . . Maria?
Maria: So much more can be done if we would all work together. We can stand up for more rights and stuff.
Peggy: If you remember in the Author's Note in the back of the book, Deedy tells that Denmark had one of the highest percentages of Jews that survived the concentration camps. It said that this was due to the fact that the Danish government argued to protect the Jews.
Maria: This shows once again how everyone's support is very important.
Peggy: Makes you think about what we could do as a collective group.

The whole reading community then began to discuss ways citizens could work to have laws changed and repealed in order to make our society more equal and help those who cannot speak for themselves.

The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo **created by Tom Feelings**

> Callous indifference or outright brutal characterizations of Africans are embedded in the language of the Western World. It is a language so infused with direct and indirect racism that it would be difficult, if not impossible, using this language in my book, to project anything black as positive. This gave me the final reason for attempting to tell the story through art alone. (From T*he Middle Passage,* Feelings, 1995, Introduction)

The Middle Passage is a picturebook with no words. Sometimes words are not enough. Sometimes words cannot begin to describe events that have taken place and continue to take place in our world. W.J.T Mitchell (1994) goes as far as to say "Texts

present, in general, a greater threat to concepts of the "integrity" or "purity" of images than vice versa" (p. 209).There are just some times when a picture can do justice to words but words cannot do justice to a picture. There are some times words cannot adequately tell the stories that need to be told. Some of these stories are found in books that only contain pictures. Often we find picturebooks where the illustrations are "just" pictures but on the other hand there are many picturebooks that contain works of art that tell a whole story of their own with no words at all. These picturebooks with no words often take several "readings" and critical dialogue to understand the full impact of what the author is trying to tell us. *The Middle Passage* is one of those books.

The Middle Passage is a book filled with pen and ink works of art that chronicle the Atlantic slave trade. According to Feelings (1995) he used "[a] form of historical narrative pictures" (Forward) to create this book. Feelings explains "Storytelling is an ancient African oral tradition through which the values and history of a people are passed on to the young" (Forward). He describes himself as "[a]nd essentially I am a storyteller. Illustrated books are a natural extension of this African oral tradition. (Forward)" Through his art, Feelings not only communicated an oral history, he also communicated the "joyful and sorrowful things" that African Americans experience even today because of the past. Feelings describes his process as "All those stories, all those things that as one person I could never experience in a single lifetime. Then when I was alone I let it seep slowly into my art" (Forward). Mitchell (2005) reminds us "Pictures, including world pictures, have always been with us, and there is no getting beyond pictures, much less world pictures, to more authentic relationship with Being, with Real, or with the World" (p. xiv). There is no getting beyond the pictures of what took place during the

four centuries of the slave trade and the pictures are almost too much to bear. Feelings not only projects his own voice in *The Middle Passage* but the voice of the millions of African Americans that were and are still affected by this dark period in American history.

The artwork in *The Middle Passage* depicts the cruel, terrifying and dehumanizing way Africans were treated during the slave trade. The reader goes from page to page following the journey from the coast of Africa to the shores of the United States. At the beginning of the journey, the reader sees a proud nation humbled through the use of violence and tactics such as divide and conquer among its people. Aboard the slave ships, the reader witnesses atrocities such as beatings, rape, child abuse, and murder. What is even more dramatic for the reader is observing the look of pain, horror, anguish, and helplessness on the face of a mother as her child is torn from her arms, the face of the husband as his mate is raped or the face of a wife as her mate is beaten and thrown overboard to the sharks. Turning each page only depicts for the reader a historical event that is almost too appalling to bear.

I purchased *The Middle Passage* as part of a collection of Coretta Scott King Award/Honor books. Even though it is a picturebook, it has the interest level designation as "Young Adult". I will have to admit that because my library patrons are young, I have placed this book on the restricted shelf. That does not mean that this book is not available for checkout but that it can only be checked out for research or critical readings. Students may take this book home with parental permission. Not because I feel that they are too young to start understanding what has taken place in America's history but because as a complete group most students are not mature enough to treat this book with sensitivity

and respect. I talked about where this book should be placed in the media center with my small reading group.

Conversation with Jake and Charlie

Peggy: As you all know, I have chosen not to put this book in regular circulation. Do you think this is a good idea?
Charlie: I think it is a good idea because it is a little too serious/real for really young children.
Peggy: Define really young children.
Charlie: You know like second grade and down.
Jake: Yeah, if my little sister brought this book home she would be upset by the pictures if she could really tell what was happening.
Peggy: Do the pictures upset you?
Charlie: Well, they kind of upset me because of what happened to the kidnapped people. The problem for me is what took place; not the pictures themselves.
Jake: Imagining what happened on those ships is just so scary.
Peggy: Was the book too scary for you, Jake?
Jake: Not scary like a "scary movie" or that it would happen to me but scary like it was so awful to see those pictures.
Peggy: Do you think any children should be allowed to look at the pictures in this book?
Jake: I think it would be okay if there was someone to talk to them about it.
Charlie: Yes, I don't think that many kids should just check it out to look at the pictures like they would an "I Spy" book. It is too serious.
Peggy: Do you think the subject of how slaves were captured and what happened on the slave ships is too graphic for elementary students?
Charlie: I think maybe for lower elementary. Not that they should not be taught about how wrong slavery was but not every little detail like the beatings and the other . . you know, stuff.
Peggy: You mean rape?
Charlie: Uh . . yeah.
Peggy: The social studies book does not cover this information does it?
Jake: Not really but when you read biographies of people like Frederick Douglass (we are doing that right now) and it says that his father was probably also his white master, you kinda know that things were not so right.
Peggy: I see, we don't often come right out in our classrooms and discuss the horrible details about slavery and the Holocaust but most of you are smart enough to infer much of what went on by reading the stories.
Jake & Charlie: Yes.

Peggy: I ordered this book in a collection of books containing African American stories. Even though the book did not have words, were you able to follow the progression of the story Feelings' told?
Charlie: Sure. He started in Africa, showed what took place on the voyage all the way up until they landed.

Peggy: Why do you think Tom Feelings created this book?
Charlie: Because he felt so strongly about what happened on the slave ships that he had to tell as many people as possible.
Peggy: After "reading" this story, do you have a new perspective on what a particular group of people experienced at the hands of another group?
Charlie: I sure do. I knew that slavery was bad. I knew about masters beating their slaves, that families were separated, and that many slaves lived in very tiny houses, but I never imagined just how horrible they were treated.

Both Charlie and Jake are probably my most two sensitive thinkers in the group. Many of the other students had comments to say but tended to be silly and unrealistic by stating what they would do if someone tried to kidnap them and put them in slavery, etc. I tried to remember that many of them use this behavior as a coping strategy when faced with a situation which is beyond their control. However, I reminded the group how lucky they all were that because of the times in which we live and the color of most of their skins, the probability of this happening to them would be very slim. They all agreed.

Ways of Imagining: The Present

> Rather, it is our responsibility as community members to recreate the socio-cultural mainstream of the classroom from the ground up each and every year. This kind of work forces everyone to begin to modify their behavior and their thinking, to relate to one another as people they are interested in knowing better, people who are different but also intriguing, people in whom they find joy, laughter, and sorrow, rather than people who can't speak English or speak it too fast, or who are poor or rich, or whose skin is a different color or whose behavior is odd. (Gallas, 2003, p. 133)
>
> "It's Saturday," Francisco said. "My *abuelo*, my grandfather, does not speak English yet. He came to California only two days ago to live with my mother and me." (*A Day's Work*, Eve Bunting)

One has to read only a few of the 250 books written by Eve Bunting to realize that she is an author who takes her responsibility as a community member to "[r]ecreate the socio-cultural mainstream of the classroom from the ground up" (Gallas, 2003, p. 133)

each time she writes a book. Some of the many subjects she has written about include: immigration, homelessness, racial violence, class difference, adoption, death, and war. She considers herself a storyteller who has chosen to write stories from her life. She has also chosen to write stories that tackle the tough issues that we all face in our lives. According to Bunting "One of my greatest joys is writing picture books. I have discovered the pleasures of telling a story of happiness or sorrow in a few simple words. I like to write picture books that make young people ponder, that encourage them to ask questions" (as cited in Kidsreads, 2009, para. 4).

Eve Buntings' stories have earned multiple awards. She counts among her highest honors *The Heal the World* award bestowed upon her by an elementary school. Bunting states "It is among the most cherished honors I have ever received and the plaque hangs proudly above my desk" (as cited in Kidsreads, 2009, para. 4). It is as if by reading one of her stories, one is forced to face a difficult issue, ponder its significance and apply its meaning to one's life, before changes in our perceptions can occur. A metaphor for this phenomenon would be that one must acknowledge an illness, recognize its manifestations and apply a remedy before healing can occur. In an interview with *Reading Rockets*, a division of Washington Educational Television, Bunting explains about her books, "Some of my picture books are very serious, like *The Wall*, which is about a father and son going to the Vietnam wall to find the grandfather's name. And it's from the heart, and I can't read it aloud myself without crying, so I don't ever try to read that one on a podium" (Reading Rockets, 2008, para. 11), Such a statement about her own books would leave one to wonder why her books are read and loved by so many. In the same interview, Bunting answers this question "At the end of my books, I always try to have

not a happy ever after thing, but hope for the future" (para. 12). Bunting's picturebooks help us to imagine the reality of the present but always give us hope for the future.

For this section I chose to read two of her picturebooks with my reading community. These books are *A Day's Work* and *Fly Away Home.* Each story brings to life two issues that my students only hear about in the news; immigration and homelessness. *A Day's Work* sends the message that while we all struggle; choosing to tell the truth influences not only the present but the future. *Fly Away Home* sends the message that while the present seems to be hopeless one must always look toward the future. Both of these stories connect to each other through the idea of work, which is an issue that has recently become a reality for many of my students. Both of these stories also connect through the idea that by imagining the reality of many people who are struggling just to survive, one can then imagine what steps need to be made to create hope for the future.

A Day's Work by Eve Bunting and Illustrated by Ronald Himler: Immigration, English as Second Language, and Work

> Work orientation is linked to independence, and independence is related to schooling because getting an education prepares one for work. (Watkins, as cited in Reynolds and Webber, 2004, p. 163)

> Francisco: We needed a day's work . . .
> Grandfather: We do not lie for work. (From *A Day's Work* by Eve Bunting)

Even though books like *A Day's Work* take place in the present, they are about as far from the majority of my student's reality as a book about fairies and gnomes. In this book a young boy, Francisco, has to assist his grandfather in finding work as a day laborer because his grandfather speaks very little English. As his grandfather's interpreter, he has the power to make decisions on his grandfather's behalf. Due to his youth and his desire help his grandfather find work Francisco makes the decision to tell a

lie therefore making a mistake that could have cost them more than money. With only a fraction of a percent of our school's student population using English as a second language, the notion that language would be a deterrent to providing for one's family is unimaginable for the majority of our students. Immigration along with all of its frustrations and concerns is not an issue in our school community. For the few students who are a part of our English for Speakers of Other Languages program (ESOL) a book like *A Day's Work* is a starting point for dialogue about their reality. Greene (1995) states, "To help the diverse students we know articulate their stories is not only to help them pursue the meaning of their lives – to find out how things are happening and to keep posing questions about the why" (p. 165). For the rest of the student population, a book like *A Day's Work* provides a window into a world unlike their own. Robinson (1990) states:

> If we would be literate, and help others to become so, it is a time for thoughtful listening to those voices that come from the margins; it is time for reflective reading of texts that inscribe those voices as centrally human ones. (p. 313)

Imagining the world of those in the margins is about accepting that the margins exist and then valuing what those in the margins have to say.

Immigration along with all of its frustrations and concerns may be not an issue in our school community but recently the idea of work has become an issue. Many of our students are well aware that even though their parents do have jobs, many of them have accepted pay cuts and furlough days in order to continue working. Watkins (in Reynolds and Webber, 2004) states "Orientation to work takes many forms, but the major importance is the example of parents going to work every day and organizing their lives

around work" (p. 163). One has to only listen to children talk to realize that they mirror their parents' attitudes and concerns about their employment status. They are very much aware of what their parents "do" and share their anxiety over the state of our economy. In some ways Francisco is no different from the students at my school. He is well aware that the family's income determines the basics and the extras. He hopes that there will be money for a new jacket for his grandfather and extra food on the table. Francisco is willing to tell a lie about his grandfather's capabilities in order help provide extra money for the family but more importantly he lies in order to obtain his grandfather's approval. He wants his grandfather to recognize that even at a young age, he can be counted on to help out with his family's finances.

The difference between Francisco and the students in my read-aloud community is that while Francisco is worried about what it would take to make his and his family's life better, my students are worried about what it would take to make life worse. Francisco dreams of earning the "extras" and my students are worried about losing the "extras". It is at the end of the story that Francisco learns from his grandfather that the qualities of respect and honesty are more important than money. It is at the end of the story that my students conclude that while we all worry about the financial status of our lives there are those because of their race, gender, social status, and even English proficiency who struggle just to survive. One student in my reading community found this story particularly poignant.

Conversation with Lucy

This is part of our conversation about the struggle to find a job.

> **Peggy:** How frustrating do you think it would be to find a job when you don't even speak the language of your potential employer?

Lucy: I think it would be awful. It is hard enough for people who DO speak English to get a job.
Peggy: Do you think that what Francisco did to help his grandfather get the landscaping job was justified.
Lucy: You mean lie about being a gardener?
Peggy: Yes.
Lucy: I think that he did not start out to lie and that he thought that maybe his grandfather would know enough to get them by.
Peggy: So maybe Francisco considered that he was only telling a partial lie because he hoped his grandfather knew something about gardening and would rescue him from the lie?
Lucy: Maybe.
Peggy: Why do you think the text said that "He tilted his cap over his eyes."?
Lucy: So that Mr. Benjamin would not see that he was sort of lying.
Peggy: Sort of lying?
Lucy: Yeah, sort of lying about his grandfather being a "fine" gardener.
Peggy: Is it ever okay to lie in order to get a job?
Lucy: Not a total full lie – like I am an "expert" at something, but if you think you could do something you could say that you might be able to do something and then learn how.
Peggy: If you say that you don't know how to do something and offer to learn the job this is not lying but don't you think that Francisco telling Mr. Benjamin that his grandfather was a "fine" gardener was an outright lie?
Lucy: Yes. I guess he did lie . . . but he really needed the job. It wasn't like someone got hurt.
Peggy: You are right and there was no guarantee that another opportunity was coming. I would think the only thing that could have been hurt was his reputation in the community.
Peggy: What do you appreciate about the end of this story?
Lucy: That Francisco learned the price of lying but that Mr. Benjamin gave them another chance.
Peggy: Why do you think that Mr. Benjamin gave them another chance?
Lucy: Because grandfather offered to fix what they messed up for free.
Peggy: Good. Back to that reputation thing . . . I heard a quote once that said "It takes a lifetime to build a reputation and a second to break it." What do you think this means?
Lucy: Just one action can change the way people see you.
Peggy: I think Francisco learned this lesson.

I could tell from our conversation that Lucy was certainly in tune with the notion of the struggle for work. What we consider "white" lies, half truths, and rationalization is an abstract concept for many children. Most of them understand the concept of stealing someone's lunch money, telling untrue stories about each other, and lying about whether

homework was completed can all be easily labeled as wrong. But just like for many adults, lying or stealing in order to survive or provide for one's family takes one into murky territory.

The group as a whole ventured from the book, *A Day's Work,* and discussed movies and stories that they had seen and heard about what lengths people have gone to survive and to help their families. We discussed that lying and stealing are wrong for whatever reason but it will be up to one's own conscience, the law, and/or religious beliefs to determine its justification. The group finally came to the conclusion that Francisco was wrong for saying that his grandfather was a "fine" gardener. He should have taken his chances and told Mr. Benjamin the truth or at least allowed his grandfather to make the decision about what to tell Mr. Benjamin about his gardening abilities. We also determined that as a group we need to be sensitive to the people in our community who are less fortunate than us. It was discussed that most of the time we are not aware of the struggle some of the families in our community face when it comes to obtaining and keeping a job.

I am happy to say for the family that Lucy's dad found another job and the family was able to rent a house. Sadly for us the house is in another school community. Thanks to our multiple ways of communicating, Lucy does talk to her friends regularly. I hope that she finds the sense of community that was developed in our reading group at her new school.

Fly Away Home **by Eve Bunting and Illustrated by Ronald Himler: Homelessness, Work, and Hope**

> World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction. (Freire, 2000, p. 50)

> My dad and I live at the airport. That's because we don't have a home and the airport is better than the streets. We are careful not to get caught. (From *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting)

I have to begin this section by telling a story. As I stated several times in this dissertation, the students where I teach live in an insulated world; especially when it comes to the marginalized. Homelessness is another idea that is far from their reality. Even though Lucy's family lost their home, they never had to face the harsh reality of being truly homeless. Every year for the ten years that I was in the fourth grade classroom, I would take my students for a carriage ride and walking tour of historic Savannah. After returning to the school, we would discuss the different points and highlights of the trip. Without fail, someone would mention that the "coolest thing" of all about the field trip was getting to see the homeless people in the squares. It was after several of these conversations that I decided the picturebook that I would read the day before the next year's historic Savannah field trip would be *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting. My reading of the book and our subsequent conversation did not lesson the novelty of seeing a homeless person on our trip but it did serve to make my students sensitive to the issues surrounding homelessness and diminish the stereotype that they had imagined. My students began to understand what it meant to exist alongside the world.

Fly Away Home is book about a community of homeless people who live in an airport. It is told from the perspective of a child; a boy. In the story the boy introduces the different people in the homeless community. He explains how he and his dad go about not getting caught and describes the mistakes that are made resulting in other homeless people being removed from the airport. Most importantly, the boy makes clear that their

homeless situation is only temporary and that his dad is doing all he can to save enough money for them to find a place to live. His dad works as a janitor on the weekend and makes numerous calls about finding a home from the newspapers taken from the trash. Throughout the book the boy experiences a range of emotions; fear, despair, frustration, and, ultimately, hope.

Due to my experience years before with my own fourth grade students, I decided to read and discuss *Fly Away Home* with my reading community. Freire (2000) states "[r]eflection – true reflection – leads to action" (p. 66). I wanted to invite their reflective participation in understanding that this marginalized group needed to be acknowledged and respected. I wanted them to recognize that homelessness is not a one dimensional issue. When your life has been carefree and you have never wanted for anything, looking down on someone who is homeless can be quite easy. Shor (1992) says, "Critical literacy begins at the levels of knowledge currently displayed by students" (p. 190). I take this to mean that when engaging in dialogue about the homeless it is important for students to be able to state their own perceptions of what it means to be homeless and let the conversation begin from this point. I also recognize that I, as the facilitator of our reading community, must also bear in mind that the knowledge currently displayed by our reading community may not always be as enlightened as I hoped or as willing to be enlightened as I envisioned. The words of Freire (2005), "It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up" (p. 5) remind me that although my students may not come away from our reading community as enlightened as I had envisioned, possibly I have planted a seed that may

even lay dormant for years but one day with the right combination of nutrients and care may grow into something substantial and strong.

I also wanted to read *Fly Away Home* with them because of the conversation that was begun when we read *A Day's Work.* I wanted my reading community to value the importance of being sensitive to the needs of a peer like Lucy. I wanted them to recognize that for many finding work is not easy. By critically reading stories about the marginalized; my students have the opportunity to experience a world beyond their world. In thinking about the quote by Freire at the beginning of this chapter we can never completely insulate ourselves from the world. We all must realize that no matter how sheltered one is from the world, the world with its heartache, atrocities, and injustices, and, on the opposite side, its joys, pleasures, and rewards exists in parallel motion. Even though many of my reading community may not physically interact with this parallel world, through critical reflection, they can interact through their attitude and respect. It was through the reading of *Fly Away Home* and our subsequent conversation that I came to realize just how many in our group had been completely insulated from the concept of "doing without".

Conversation with Tina

The following conversation with Tina sheds some light on the perspective of someone who as never wanted for anything.

> **Peggy:** (to the reading community) What do you consider "unfair" in this world?
> **Reading Group:** (random answers thrown from the group) War. Disease. Homelessness. Violence.
> **Tina:** (waving her hand excitedly) I know what's unfair.
> **Peggy:** (expecting a profound statement) What is that, Tina?
> **Tina:** (with a very serious voice and face) Children's menus.
> **Peggy:** Excuse me? What?

> **Tina:** (in all seriousness) Children's menus. I hate going to a restaurant and the waiter just assumes that I want a children's menu.
> **Peggy:** (it is at this point I realize that Tina is truly genuine in her answer) That is interesting. Basically, you feel that it should be left up to you decide whether you want a children's menu or not. If you do want one, you will ask for one, correct?
> **Tina:** Yes.
> **Reading Group:** (give various responses while chiming in to support Tina) That has happened to me. I know what you mean. Don't you just hate that?

It is here as the group leader that I can make the choice of getting on my "soapbox" and tell Tina that she needs to be thankful that she can afford to eat in a restaurant or reflect on these words of Greene (1995) when she reminds "The favored one seldom questions the language of dominance or efficacy in which they are reared, although they may seek out discourses more appropriate for a shared young culture or for moments of rebellion or adolescent discontent" (p. 111). Without knowing it, Tina has just used the language of dominance. Not only has she announced to the group that she is comfortable assuming an adult role in a restaurant, she is also comfortable assuming the hegemonic role of consumer, as well as taking for granted that her family can afford to eat at sit-down restaurants where one is waited upon. I also remember the words of Freire (2005) "Speaking to and with the learners is an unpretentious but very positive way for democratic teachers to contribute in their school to the training of responsible and critical citizens." (p. 115) and understand that I run the risk of shutting down the conversation completely by lecturing instead of leading. Therefore I decide to make it my goal to lead the group back to my original intent and to use this place in our conversation as a "teachable moment".

> **Peggy:** (to the general group) I actually have the opposite problem at my house. My teenagers complain that because they can no longer order from the children's menu they feel that they are wasting food by not being able to finish a whole adult meal therefore throwing much of it away. They often choose to share or order an appetizer and a salad. Aren't we all lucky that these are the dilemmas that we

face? *(After a pause)* However, I want you to think about the larger picture of things that are unfair. I want you to think more socially and not specifically about yourself. You can even think about something to do with food but opposite of too much.
Tina: Like not enough food?
Peggy: Exactly. While we are worried about children's menus, there are children who don't know if they will have anything to eat for dinner at all. Sometimes meals at school are their only meals of the day.
Tina: I heard once that some poor children eat ketchup sandwiches.
Peggy: That's right. They also put ketchup and water in a pot to make soup.
Tina: Gross!! I just wouldn't eat.
Peggy: If you were hungry enough you would.
Tina: I guess you are right.
Peggy: It kind of puts children's menus into perspective doesn't it?
Tina: (along with the rest of the reading group) Yes.
Peggy: Along these same lines I want to talk about another issue that seems unfair which is homelessness.

After this conversation we went on to discuss the causes of homelessness and the group's perceptions. I was amazed at the gamut of answers that I received from the group. At first many of them gave stereotypical answers like "Some of them are crazy from one of the wars", "Some homeless people just have mental illnesses and cannot live with people or hold jobs", "Some bought too many drugs and ran out of money to pay rent" and even "Some homeless people just don't want to work." Because Lucy was a part of our group I wanted to be particularly sensitive to the fact that her dad had recently lost a well paying job due to downsizing. It is at this point that I decided to read the story *Fly Away Home* aloud and return to our conversation, where appropriate, as the story unfolded.

Conversation with Chip

It was my exchange with Chip as we progressed through the story that was particularly enlightening.

Peggy: I am going to read a passage from the book and then I want to return to some of your responses that you gave me earlier. This is Andrew talking to his dad . . .

"Will we ever have our own apartment again? I ask Dad. I'd like it to be the way it was, before Mom died.
"Maybe we will," he says. "If I can find more work. If we can save some money."

Peggy: Some of you said that many people are homeless because they **don't** want to work. How does the passage put this in perspective?
Reading Group: (various responses) "Some people don't make enough money." "Some people lose their jobs and don't have any savings." "Some people get sick and have high doctor bills."
Peggy: I wonder if the death of Andrew's mother had anything to do with their homelessness.
Chip: Like they didn't have insurance so their bills were high?
Peggy: Yes, maybe the dad has to pay back the hospital and so there is no extra money. I guess the mother didn't have life insurance, either.
Chip: That is just crazy not to have insurance of any kind.
Peggy: Maybe so but millions of people do not have insurance either because they can't afford the premiums or they are too sick to be insured.
Chip: Yeah, well why can't the dad get a job and make enough money so he can buy insurance as well as a house?
Peggy: Maybe he has no job skills. Anyway, what is he going to do for childcare? Andrew isn't old enough to go to school yet. Remember, mom is no longer there to keep Andrew while dad goes to work. Here is yet another thing that is going to cost him part of his pay. Listen to this passage from the book . . .

But I know he's trying to find us a place. He takes newspapers from the trash baskets and makes pencil circles around letters and numbers. Then he goes to the phones. When he comes back he looks sad. Sad and angry. I know he's been calling about an apartment. I know that the rents are too high for us.

Chip: This is very frustrating. It seems to cost him more **to** work than not to work at all. No wonder some people don't work. *(Chip stops to think)* He should have gone to college.
Peggy: Unfortunately, there are college educated people who are struggling to find work these days but I will admit education or a set of job skills gives someone looking for a job an advantage.
Chip: That's why I am going to college.
Peggy: You are fortunate that you have the ability and financial resources to go to college. Listen to this passage in the book . . .

After next summer, Dad says, I have to start school.
"How?" I ask.
"I don't know But it's important. We'll work it out."

> *Denny's mom says he can wait for awhile. But Dad says I can't wait.*
>
> **Peggy:** Do you think that Eve Bunting is trying to make a point here in the story? She wants us to understand that homelessness is a complicated issue but maybe education is one way of escaping?
> **Chip:** Sounds like it to me.

At the time of the reading *Fly Away Home*, like Tina, Chip had no idea what it would be like to do without or feel the frustration of a joblessness or homelessness. Up to this point, both children have led particularly uneventful lives. However, since our small reading community has come into existence, both Tina and Chip have gone through life-changing experiences.

For Tina, some days are better than others, both physically and emotionally. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, she is fortunate because her parents have the medical insurance, the life-skills, and the tenacity to see that she receives the best care in the world. What the future holds for Tina, we are not sure but we can only hope for the best.

As for Chip, during this past school year, his parents divorced, his mother entered into the full-time workforce, his father left his job to take a job in a neighboring county, Chip and his brother have moved with his mother from a large home to a small rental, and his father has recently remarried thus adding a stepmother and four step-siblings to his life. Like Tina, some days are better than others for Chip. Chip has experienced first-hand what it feels like to watch a parent struggle to find a job.

Closing Discussion

> To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or "common-sensible" and to carve out new orders of experience. (Greene, 1995, p. 19)
>
> "Don't stop trying," I told it silently. "Don't! You can get out!", "Fly, bird." I whispered. "Fly away home!" (From *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting)

In the book "*Fly Away Home*" Ronald Himler's watercolor illustrations are a compliment to Eve Bunting's text. Himler reinterprets Bunting's story by illustrating it as it unfolds. As a group we noticed that the faces of the people who are a part of the homeless community except for the boy and his dad are vague, indistinct. Our discussion led us to wonder if this is Himler's way of showing how we often regard our homeless; as faceless individuals who have neither names nor life-stories. We have a way of pretending that those who are different from us do not exist. We talked about how we often think that if we ignore our homeless long enough they will go away. I told the group about my experience with my former students and the Historic Savannah fieldtrips. I told my reading community that I very well might have been just as guilty as my former students but at the opposite end of the spectrum. We discussed that I was distressed that my students were excited by the novelty of seeing a homeless person whereas I always chose to pretend that they are not there when I am in the downtown area. Then we discussed the words of Freire (2000), "The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization" (p. 48). We came to the conclusion that until we acknowledge the homeless, not as a novelty, but as people with names and stories to tell, then their future will be hard to imagine.

Ways of Imagining: A Friend of Someone Else's Mind

The Lemonade Club **written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco**

> Almost every day, just as the last bell was about to ring, Miss Wichelson would point to a basket of fresh lemons that she always kept on her desk and say. "And if life hands you a lemon or two today – and you all know how sour lemons are" –

> Everyone would make a face. “Just add water and sugar and what do you have?” (From *The Lemonade Club*, Polacco, 2007)

I have to begin this section with a confession about Patricia Polacco. I have heard her speak on two different occasions and both times she managed to bring me to tears. In fact, I began crying before she even started her second speech by just thinking about her first. Even though both speeches were ultimately different, she shared not only her insight on encouraging students to read but her own personal insight as to how we should all treat each other with respect. Using her life-story, Polacco recounted how she always felt “different” academically at school. She talks about how she did not learn to read until she was 14 years old. Polacco states on her webpage:

> I am a dyslectic, disnumeric, and disgraphic. Can you imagine what it was like to try to learn along with other students when I needed specialized help . . . help that wasn’t available in those days? I remember feeling dumb, that terrible feeling about myself was compounded by being teased by a bully. That not only changed my life and it made me feel so unsafe and so sad that I didn’t want to go to school anymore. (Thank You Mr. Falker: The Story, n.d, para 1.)

Polacco, being of Ukrainian, Russian, and Irish descent, is quick to tell her audience that there are many ways that children feel different. In an interview with Susie Wilde, (Children's Literature, 2004), Polacco explains “I always saw people of all races in our living room and heard them spoken of with such dignity. I never heard a racial slur until middle school. That's when I started to get the picture and realize there's cruelty in this life, it isn't a perfect place" (para. 11). At the heart of why Polacco is such a moving public speaker is that she is a storyteller. Through the stories of her life and the lives of

the people in her past and present, she is able to literally and figuratively paint pictures that allows her audience, both listeners and readers, to imagine what it would be like to be a runaway slave, a neighborhood misfit, to grow old, to deal with sibling rivalry, to have a learning disability, or even life-threatening illness, which is the subject of her picturebook, *The Lemonade Club*.

The Lemonade Club is about a classroom community within a school community. I prefer to refer to it as a community because the relationships described in the story go beyond the traditional notion of teacher and class. There are several stories taking place inside this picturebook. The first is about a friendship between two girls, the next is about the relationship between the two girls and their teacher, and then the final story is about the relationships within the classroom community.

It is evident at the beginning of the story that Miss Wichelman, the teacher, shares a special relationship with her students. She continually reminds the class how to make the best of a bad situation and to believe in their abilities and dreams. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that one of the two friends, Marilyn, is diagnosed with cancer. As Marilyn goes through chemotherapy, both Traci, the other friend, and Miss Wichelman are often by her side. It is when Marilyn returns to school, after her chemotherapy treatments, that we see the impact that Miss Wichelman's words and actions have had upon the class. Marilyn, wearing a scarf to hide the fact that she has lost all of her hair, enters the classroom and finds that all of her classmates are wearing funny hats. The class then removes their hats to show Marilyn that they have all shaved their heads in support of her illness. Not only has the class shaved their heads but Miss

Wichelman has shaved her head as well. One would think that the story ends on this page but Polacco the storyteller adds more to the story.

As Marilyn is recovering, the two friends and Miss Wichelman begin meeting after school to talk. During one of their talks, the girls learn that Miss Wichelman has breast cancer. It is here that the girls become the encouragers. They remind Miss Wichelman of all the words she had spoken to them. The story ends as Miss Wichelman, bride and cancer survivor, follows Traci and Marilyn, bridesmaid and cancer survivor, down the aisle on her wedding day.

Even though I have read this book many times in the past, my choice to read it aloud to my small reading community had particular significance this past school year. As already mentioned in this dissertation, Tina was diagnosed with a debilitating neuromuscular disease during the summer break. At the time school started her prognosis for ever walking again was not good. The students in our reading community, as well as the school community, were at a loss as how to react and treat Tina. Even more devastating, another student in the same grade went to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy, only to be diagnosed with a rare ovarian cancer. At first her prognosis was terminal. Once again, my small reading community, as well as the school community, was rocked with grief and were at a loss as to how to treat Karen if she ever returned to school.

My school counselor and I decided that we would read *The Lemonade Club* to the fifth grade school community in order to begin a conversation about the notions of compassion and empathy. Reynolds (2003) states, “Compassion mediates through empathy” (p. 49). He then goes on to explain, “Empathy stresses participation, insight,

and understanding. It simply is not enough to be sympathetic and sentimental about problems of human need. We must empathize and participate" (p. 49). By participating we must actively respond to the hurting, the pain, and the fear. Noddings (as cited in Ayers & Miller, p. 1998) states "My thesis here is that critical thinking needs a starting point in both character and feeling, and most episodes of critical thinking should be liberally sprinkled with turning points – points at which the thinker reaches toward the living other with feeling that responds to the other's condition" (p.161). We wanted our school community to begin thinking about not just feeling sorry for both Tina and Karen but trying to imagine what it would be like to be in their shoes.

Conversation with Maria

I chose to single out this conversation with Maria because Maria is Tina's best friend and she seemed to be the most affected by Tina's illness. At first she seemed at a loss as to whether she should treat Tina as if nothing had happened and not acknowledge the illness, to be her special friend and do everything for her, or be tough on Tina and not allow her to give in to her illness. I began the conversation with the small reading community about the difference between empathy and sympathy. The day we read this story Tina was not a part of the group. This helped the group, especially Maria, to talk about their feelings.

> **Peggy:** Who can explain the difference between sympathy and empathy?
> **Maria:** Sympathy is when you feel sorry for someone and empathy is when you try to feel what they are feeling.
> **Peggy:** Which is better?
> **Maria:** I don't know. I would think that they both should be used at different times.
> **Peggy:** Using Tina, give me an example of sympathy.
> **Maria:** When I heard that Tina was sick I told her that I was sorry. I even cried because I felt bad that she was scared and hurting.
> **Peggy:** Now, using Tina again, give me an example of empathy.

Maria: I am not really sure.
Peggy: Well try to imagine what it would be like to lay in bed and wonder what is wrong with you or whether when you wake up you will ever be able to walk again. Think about how it feels to go once a week and have medicine injected into you with needles just to keep you walking. Think about how it feels to limp down the hall and see people avoiding making eye contact because you now drag your foot.
Maria: So I actually have to get inside Tina's mind and understand the reason for her emotions and imagine her physical pain?
Peggy: Do you think by empathizing with her, you can get a better handle on what's going through her mind right now?
Maria: Yes. I guess I have to remember the way the old Tina's actions were and put them together with what she is probably experiencing now.
Peggy: Do you remember how Tina liked to be the center of attention when she was well.
Maria: Yes. She still wants to be the center of attention and but this illness has given her some negative attention. Some of the boys have made fun of the way she walks.
Peggy: So she may be hurting physically and emotionally?
Maria: I guess.
Peggy: So, she can use her illness to be the center of attention but this has also has caused her emotional pain because of the taunting?
Maria: Yes, it is so frustrating.
Peggy: It is very hard to stay friends with someone but illness makes it even harder**.**
Maria: I know.
Peggy: Think with empathy instead of sympathy and it might be easier.

We then talked about Karen's illness. It is Hillary who responded to my question.

Peggy: Tell me why it might be harder to be empathetic towards Karen than Tina?
Hillary: If empathy is trying to feel the other person's emotion and physical pain, then I can see how it would be hard to do that for Karen because she might die. No one can imagine that feeling unless they have been there.
Peggy: Are you sure?
Hillary: Well yeah! How can you feel that unless you have been told you are going to die but in the end you get cured?
Peggy: You don't think it is possible to try to imagine how scared Karen is right now? Scared of the pain of chemo, scared of surgery, scared of losing her hair, and scared of dying?
Hillary: You can try to imagine it but you won't ever do it.
Peggy: Empathy is not about being able to know exactly what a person if feeling but to try to understand and experience what it is possibly like.
Hillary: Every time I think about Karen I just want to cry. I just don't know what to say to her.

> **Peggy:** Are you crying from your own frustration or crying because you have imagined her pain? Empathy is about Karen not about you.
> **Hillary:** I think I see what you mean.

It has been a tough year for our entire fifth grade class. Dealing with the emotions of leaving the security of elementary school behind is hard enough but to have two classmates who began the year with uncertain futures made it even harder. As I have mentioned before, so far, Tina is responding well to treatments. Karen, who was very well liked by her classmates because of her quiet and loving nature, was absent for much of the beginning of the year as she recuperated from surgery and chemotherapy. She returned to school after Thanksgiving. Even though she had lost her hair, she came back with a clean bill of health and we are hopeful that she will remain cancer-free. Now that six months have passed, she remains healthy.

Ways of Imagining: Alternative Realities

***Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg**

> "And the finished work is always disappointing because my imagination exceeds the limits of my skills" (Van Allsburg, 1986, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, para. 16).

Chris Van Allsburg did not intend to become a children's book author and illustrator. According to his biography "He attended the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor with the vague idea of pursuing a law degree, but after a freshman course in drawing he decided to study sculpture" (Kidsreads, 2010, para.1). He had actually achieved a certain amount of success as a sculptor when he wrote and illustrated his first picturebook, *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*. It was an immediate success and earned him the coveted Caldecott Honor Award. Fortunately, for us he has been writing ever since.

Believing in the fantastic has always been important to Van Allsburg. In his Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech (1986), Van Allsburg explains "The inclination to believe in the fantastic may strike some as a failure in logic, or gullibility, but it's really a gift" (para. 11). Many of his books are based upon every day events mixed together with the fantastic. Because he is both the writer and the illustrator of his stories, he uses his illustrations to take the reader far beyond the words in the story. According to Van Allsburg, "The success of art is not dependent on its nearness to perfection but its power to communicate" (1986, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, para. 19). In many of his books, Van Allsburg communicates that it is never too late to change. In books like *Just A Dream*, it often takes both ordinary and fantastic events to lead to change.

The reader recognizes at the beginning of the story in *Just A Dream* that Walter, the boy in the story, is in need of an attitude adjustment when it comes to his narcissism. However, spending just a small amount of time sitting with a group of elementary students can lead one to recognize that Walter's attitude is not the exception to the rule but the norm. This "all about me" attitude could possibly be blamed on the stage of a child's development but much of it can be attributed to the media and over-indulgent parents. Walter is no exception. We can tell from the illustrations that Walter lives in an upper-middle class neighborhood and with the mention of no siblings, is obviously an only child.

Though only in early adolescence, Walter is not only allowed to walk home alone from school, he is given money to stop by the bakery each day for a doughnut. Instead of being a good steward of these privileges he chooses to throw his trash on the ground. Walter then proceeds to scoff at the notion of receiving a tree for a birthday gift when the

girl next door proudly shows him her tree. Finally, he disregards his only responsibility which is separating the family trash into three separate cans in order to watch television. The particular show of interest is about a boy who lives in the future. Walter goes to sleep wishing that he could live in a future filled with all convenience and no responsibility.

The story proceeds as Walter awakes in one dream after another. In each dream Walter witnesses a future filled with mountains of trash, land bereft of trees, smog-filled air, commercially developed sanctuaries, stagnant oceans and lakes, and noise polluted highways. Many of the places that Walter held dear were now memories of the past because human progress and greed necessitated their demise. Walter's dream was actually a nightmare.

Finally, Walter wakes up in his own bedroom back to the present. What he had witnessed as his future was not what he had hoped. Thankfully, Walter did posses the good conscience to recognize that his actions were contributing to the future he did not want so he proceeded to rectify his mistakes. He even requests a tree for his birthday. The story ends with Walter experiencing another dream. This time he sees a future of quiet neighborhoods where people are willing to be inconvenienced in order to save the environment. Walter's last words are the words that we can only hope are uttered for many years to come "I like it here."

Conversation with Tommy

Every spring, when I taught fourth grade, the entire fourth grade participated in a week long Earth Day unit culminating in an Earth Day musical performed at the April PTO meeting. What is interesting to note is that no matter how much environmental data my students researched, how many recycling dioramas they created, or how many skits

and songs they performed, conservation, renewable resources, and sustainable living were all ideas which they made no life connection. I found after ten years of Earth Day projects and performances, that I could be happy if my students would just make a commitment to separate their trash for recycling, reduce their use of water, and make an effort to help their families reduce their electricity consumption. Now after twenty years, I am still pushing for the same behavior modifications because most of the students at my school still have not concept that their lack of environmental awareness or concern has consequences for the future. My discussion with Tommy is an example.

Peggy: Have you ever thought about what the environment of the world will be like in 100 years?
Tommy: I won't be here so it doesn't matter.
Peggy: You might not be here but your children and grandchildren may be here.
Tommy: It will be their problem, not mine.
Peggy: Do you think that your grandparents and great grandparents also felt that way?
Tommy: I never really thought about it.
Peggy: Okay, let me ask you another question. What do you think the environment if the world will be in fifty years. Odds are you will be here in 50 years.
Tommy: I figure it will be pretty much the same as it is today. The government is going to make laws that will keep the air and water from getting too bad.
Peggy: Maybe our government but not the governments of other countries.
Tommy: That is their problem. As long as we stay in the United States, we will be okay.
Peggy: Don't you think that air pollution and the overuse of natural resources can affect neighboring countries or countries that borrow/pay for outside resources?
Tommy: Maybe. I never thought about that.
Peggy: What about our dependence on foreign oil and the price of gasoline? If it costs almost $3.00 today, how much do think it may cost fifty years from now when we are even more dependent on another country?
Tommy: It will probably cost at least $6.00 a gallon then. If we have to buy our oil from someone else I guess it can cost whatever they want to ask.
Peggy: Exactly. So what do you think the solution is?
Tommy: Find our own oil? (Sheepish grin)
Peggy: Think again . . . .
Tommy: Quit using so much and find other ways to fuel our cars besides oil.
Peggy: How do we quit using so much?

Tommy: Invent better gas mileage cars, build better homes, don't drive so much, and don't use so many lights.
Peggy: Now you are on the right track . . . .

As a reading community we went on to discuss that unless some medical miracle occurred, all of us would not be alive in 100 years but our overuse of the natural resources available would not only have consequences for the future but little consequences for the present. We talked about forest fires and the mudslides and even talked about the causes of the dustbowl that they studied in their social studies text. I reminded them that some of the problems we have today are because the people who lived 100 year before us did not think about the consequences of their lack of environmental awareness and concern. This conversation led to the next picturebook, *The Lorax*.

***The Lorax* by Written and Illustrated Dr. Seuss**

> "But now," says the Once-ler, "Now that you're here, the words of the Lorax seems perfectly clear. UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." (From *The Lorax*, 1971, Seuss)

I am an ardent fan of many children's book authors but Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) is one of my utmost favorites. Dr. Seuss is known for his uncanny illustrations and his command of language. Dr. Seuss's first foray into writing was not children's literature. According to his biography (All About Dr. Seuss, 2004), his first writing position was editor-in-chief of his college newspaper. After college he spent several years as a cartoonist, a contributor to major magazines and newspapers, and making training films for the US army. After being rejected twenty-seven times, his first children's book was accepted by Vanguard Press in 1937. Upon reading an article about illiteracy rates in

America, Seuss wrote two of his most famous books, “The Cat in the Hat” and “Green Eggs and Ham” based upon 25 and 50, respectively, beginning sight words. His use of imagination, illustrations, and meter in his writing has endeared him to beginning readers all over the world.

At first look, Dr. Seuss books seem to be an exercise in sight words, phonics, and rhyme. The illustrious characters with even more illustrious names that fill his books have delighted readers for decades. At closer examination, each Dr. Seuss book, especially his books for older readers, contains a message that was pertinent for the time it was written as well as today. His books explore the notions of race, equality, difference, capitalism, exploitation, hegemony, and community.

The Lorax is a multifaceted book that delves into the notions of capitalism, exploitation, hegemony, waste, pollution, extinction, and renewal. This book, which was written in 1971, the year after the first Earth Day observance, has all the ingredients for a critical conversation about the environment. I actually read this book to all of my reading communities every year during Earth Day week.

In the case of *The Lorax*, the “where” is more important than the “when”. From the very first page of the text, the reader can “see” that something devastating has happened to the community where the Lorax once lived. The illustration shows a drab, desolate landscape with only a bird and a little boy to keep each other company. Dr. Seuss, who spent many years satirizing politics through cartoons used his knowledge of marginalized societies to effectively set the stage for the story. Off in the distance you can see the town where the rest of the population resides. The intimate understanding of this scene alludes to the idea that this devastation happened to a community that was

located on the edge of town. This was a community that did not have the resources or the specialized knowledge it needed to stop the destruction that took place.

The community represented in the text, the Truffula Trees, Swomee-Swans, the Brown Bar-ba-loots, and Humming-Fish had no voice at all in the decision making process. Because of this, the Lorax became their lone spokesperson. He states "I am the Lorax," he coughed and he wiffed. He sneezed and he snuffled. He snargled. He sniffed. "Once-ler!" he cried with a cruffulous croak. "Once-ler! You're making such smogulous smoke!" (*The Lorax*, 1971, Seuss)

Seuss effectively demonstrated how those without power are the ones who usually are situated at or near industrial sites of pollution, by telling how as each time the Once-ler's factory became bigger, more pollution was created and more natural habitat was lost. Because the characters in the book actually represented creatures instead of humans each time a part of the natural habitat was lost, the Lorax sent a different creature away. First, the Bar-ba-loots, due to loss of food in their natural habitat, then, the Swomee-Swans, because they could no longer sing for the smog, and then, the Humming-Fish, because their pond had become polluted. Even in the end, the Lorax had the luxury of lifting "himself by the seat of his pants" and "took leave of this place, through the hole in the smog, without leaving a trace." Seuss reminds us with this last statement that because of encroaching development and industry many of our own creatures will be lost "without leaving a trace."

In the end it was Once-ler's inability to recognize what his self-interest had caused that brought *The Lorax* to its climax. Not only was the natural habitat destroyed and the indigenous creatures gone, but the industry that brought the destruction was gone

as well. All the Once-ler had left was “a small pile of rocks, with one word . . . “UNLESS”. Was there possibly some way to reverse the destruction?

One could not actually say that *The Lorax* has a happy ending. What it does have is a promise of a happy ending if changes are made. What is interesting to note is that it is not the Lorax that gives the charge for a brighter future but actually the Once-ler. He commands the boy who has been listening to the whole environmental tale to catch the last Truffula Seed and take responsibility for seeing that the Truffula Seed reverses the damage that Once-ler’s own greed and self-interest has created. The book draws to a close as the Once-ler beseeches the boy to “Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air. Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack. Then maybe the Lorax and all of his friends will come back.” (*The Lorax*, 1971, Seuss)

The boy now has the opportunity to become the hero in the story. It is interesting to note that it was a child that had been given the charge to renew the devastation wrought by the hands of adults. I am sure that Dr. Seuss was aware of his audience when he wrote the text. I am also sure that Dr. Seuss saw the opportunity to educate his young readers before consumerism and self-interest became a way of life. Thinking about young learners, Giroux (2006) reflects:

> What might it mean to link education not merely to modes of self-discovery, self-criticism, and social criticism but also to social responsibility and collective action, particularly in the service of expanding and deepening the ‘democratic, secular, and open character’ of contemporary society. (p. 70)

Giroux builds on Dr. Seuss’s hopes when he explains:

> If public values along with life-long education, not only for the acquisition of skills but also for the capacities they impart that enables students and others to exercise the agency and the courage necessary both to hold power accountable and to intervene in the world in the order to expand and the range of knowledge, democratic values, choices and social responsibilities. (p. 71)

Our ecological future depends on the next generation of courageous and socially responsible citizens. It will be through an eco-critical conversation about the dangers of capitalism depicted in *The Lorax* that children will see the cost of consumerism and self-interest. It will be through an eco-critical conversation about the notion of hope in *The Lorax* that children will see that they have been given the charge to take the leftover seed from destruction and create and sustain new life.

Conversation with Chip

The reading community's conversation about the picturebook, *The Lorax*, was actually a continuation of the conversation that was begun with the reading of the preceding picturebook*, Just A Dream*. My reading community knew all of the right words to say when discussing the slogan "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle". They can even explain why it is important that we reduce, reuse, and recycle but as a group, they still had not made a personal connection to how reducing, reusing and recycling benefits their lives. It was not until we discussed the ideas in terms of money did they pay attention. Much like the Once-ler in *The Lorax*, my reading community began to pay attention when we talked about the cost of not taking care of the earth.

> **Peggy:** What would you say is the main reason why people have begun to pay attention to things like water conservation, sustainable forests, recycling, proper disposal of chemicals, carpooling, etc.
> **Chip:** I think people do it because it is the "hip" thing to do.

Peggy: Define "hip".
Chip: Well, it seems that people think they are cool when they live in communities that have recycling programs. People look cool when they have these separate garbage cans for plastic, paper, and glass.
Peggy: That's cool? So people go to all that trouble to look cool?
Chip: Well if not cool then they get this "feel good" sense that they are making a big difference on the earth.
Peggy: So you are saying that when paper is remade into new paper or bathroom tissue, plastic bottles are turned into play rugs, and aluminum tabs/cans are recycled into more aluminum cans instead of ending up in the landfill, it is only to make people to feel good.
Chip: Yes. I heard that it takes a lot of energy to recycle all of that stuff. Electricity and water takes up resources, too.
Peggy: You heard it or you have researched it for your self?
Chip: I heard it.
Peggy: Oh. I think after we are done you might want to Google the cost & benefits of recycling aluminum and see what you find.
Peggy: What about gas consumption**?** Do you think it is "cool" to share rides or limit your traveling? Do you think it is cool to drive a smaller car?
Chip: I think some people think they are cool when they drive those tiny hybrid cars.
Peggy: Let me tell you of something before I ask you my next question. In my diving lifetime, I have paid anywhere from 50 cents a gallon to almost 4 dollars a gallon for gas. This may not mean a lot to you in gas consumption but it should mean a lot to you in terms of money spent. I used to drive to Atlanta and back for about 60 dollars. Now I spend about 120 dollars to drive to Atlanta. Why do you think gas has gone up?
Chip: Because we had a war with people that own the oil wells and we need oil from other countries, too.
Peggy: Yes. Those other countries are in charge of how much oil they pump from the ground. If there is no surplus, then prices are high. What does this mean for American drivers, namely your parents?
Chip: They have to pay a lot for gas.
Peggy: If they are paying from the same paycheck, twice as much for gas as they did last year, where does the money come from?
Chip: Not sure?
Peggy: It comes from the money they use to eat out, the money they use to take quick trips to Wal-Mart, the money they use to go on vacation, or they have to go in debt to do anything extra. Have you noticed your family doing less stuff in the past year?
Chip: I guess. I never really thought about it. I know that we don't drive to see my grandmother who is 4 hours away as often as we used to.
Peggy: It is probably because it just costs too much to make that trip if you can only stay for the weekend. Do you think you might go more often if you were driving a small car instead of your dad's SUV?
Chip: Maybe.

> **Peggy:** Do you think that if American's would stop using so much gas, the gas prices might come down because the other countries will have a surplus?
> **Chip:** Maybe.
> **Peggy:** I guess driving a car that gets great gas mileage is more than just cool.
> **Chip:** Maybe.

It took the whole group several minutes to get their heads around the fact that overuse of natural resources not only affects future generations but it also affects the prices that they pay for the items that they take for granted. It was only until I reminded them that higher prices also meant less "stuff" that they began to talk serious about ways to keep from depleting resources like water, oil, trees, and even air. Like the Once-ler, it took the loss of money and "things" for them to see the importance of conservation.

Ways of Imagining: Beyond the Daily Lived Experience

Grandmama's Pride: **written by Becky Birtha & illustrated by Colin Bootman**

> Moreover, to learn and to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new and this kind of awareness must be linked to imagination. (Greene, 1995, p. 20)

> "You can forget about the other signs," Grandmama said. "We held our ground and got those laws struck down." She laughed. "Those days are gone forever!" (From *Grandmama's Pride* by Becky Birtha, 2005)

For the majority of the children at my school, the notion of exclusion is beyond their lived experience. Naturally, they have been excluded from games on the playground or from certain cliques for petty issues such as classroom rivalry or popularity. However, none of them have ever experienced exclusion based upon their race, religion, or gender. None of them have ever experienced what is like to be told that they are not allowed in a public place, school, or even church. *Grandmama's Pride* is a book that can be the starting place for children who have never experienced what it means to be excluded. By reading this story, hopefully, both the reader and the listeners will realize what it truly

means to work and play together as a community. Hopefully, when they see the consequences of what it means to be excluded like the family in the story; petty issues such as playground rivalry and popularity will become unimportant. Gallas (2003) states:

> But above all, reclaiming imagination will produce classrooms filled with joy and opportunity, multivocal, multimodal classrooms where literacy learning begins in the body, with aspiration and the desire to know because discourse we seek has become a necessity and the community we are part of is creating a new and better vision of the world. (p. 169)

Books like *Grandmama's Pride* are specifically about "creating a new and better vision of the world."

Becky Birtha has been writing books for adults for many years. *Grandmama's Pride* is the first book Birtha she has written for children. This book has won multiple awards for its accurate as well as endearing depiction of the life of an African American family living in the south in the 1950's. Birtha tells "Even though Grandmama's Pride is set during difficult times in history, the children and families of this story find ways to triumph." (para.1)

In the story, an African American little girl, her younger sister, and her mother who live "up north" visit Grandmama who lives "down south" in the summer of 1956. At the beginning of the story, the little girls experience what many southern African Americans had been experiencing all their lives; segregation. Fortunately for them, their mother and Grandmama shielded them from this cruel fact through their own proactive and prideful tactics. Mama pretended that the back of the bus was the better place to ride and Grandmama basically ignored the unfair laws by choosing alternate strategies of

coping. Grandmama simply refused to participate in any activity in which she was segregated from whites. The two little girls interpreted the source of Grandmama's actions as being too proud to participate not exclusion.

However, it was during this same summer visit the oldest little girl, Sarah Marie, learns to read. Along with the pleasure of reading came the reality that people were not all treated the same. The little girl comes to the realization that many of her grandmama's prideful actions were in response to segregation laws. She begins to read the signs that designate white bathrooms from "colored" bathrooms and signs that indicate "whites only" water fountains and lunch counters. Sarah Marie's response is two-fold; she decides not to visit the places with the signs anymore that summer and she joins her mother and grandmother in sheltering her little sister, who still does not read, from the harsh lessons she learned that summer.

The story ends when the family visits Grandmama again the next summer. It was during the year between the two visits that Sarah Marie has been able to read about all of the changes that had been taking place in the south. Sarah Marie and her family were able to experience firsthand the results of words she had not quite understood during the winter. These words included: boycott, ballot, civil rights, Supreme Court ruling, and overturned laws. Sarah Marie and her family also learned firsthand that determination and human spirit can triumph. Freire (2000) states, "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but by only true words, with which men and women transform the world" (p. 88). The courage and determination of the men and women in those southern towns in the 1950's serve to teach us all the importance of transforming the world.

Conversation with Lucy

The conversation that took place after we read *Grandmama's Pride* centered on the ideas of exclusion and segregation. Because the members of my small reading community are considered some of the most popular students in their grade, their notion of exclusion comes nowhere near the extent of what exclusion means when compared to the idea of segregation. Even the non-white members in my reading community cannot imagine what their grandparents and great grandparents experienced just some fifty years ago.

Peggy: Has anyone had the experience of being excluded?
Lucy: I have.
Peggy: From what?
Lucy: From some of the girl groups that form at lunch and on the playground.
Peggy: You mean like a group of girls who were sitting together, either talking or playing, would not let you be a part of their group?
Lucy: Yes. It's usually when they are sitting together and talking about other girls or a boy, and when you walk up, they stop talking. They sometimes move away.
Peggy: So they don't come right out and tell you to leave?
Lucy: No. They aren't open about it. They just kind of "snub" you. You can get the hint that you are not wanted. Sometimes they find spots on the playground where it is hard to join them.
Peggy: Why do you think you are excluded?
Lucy: Because the person they are talking about might be my friend or they might be talking about me. Sometimes they are telling secrets that are fun to have only between them.
Peggy: Almost like a game?
Lucy: Yes.
Peggy: Have you ever been a part of a group that did the same thing to someone else?
Lucy: (*Looking very sheepishly*) Yes. Most all of us do it. In fact, sometimes we form groups against groups. It's like if you will not let me in your group, I will form my own.
Peggy: Have you ever been excluded because of your race?
Lucy: (Looking surprised) My race? No. It is usually a girl thing.
Peggy: So you have never been excluded from any group because you are black?
Lucy: No.
Peggy: Have you ever talked about segregation with your family?
Lucy: Not much. Of course, we know it has happened from our history and from the social studies book, but we don't talk much about it.

Peggy: Tell me how you see the difference between what you girls do to each other and what happened to African Americans between the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement.
Lucy: What we do to each other is just stupid girl stuff. It hurts to know that another group of girls that you thought were your friends suddenly don't want you in their group and start talking about you. Segregation was serious stuff. Black people were beaten and even worse for just even trying to go places that were considered off limits.
Peggy: Why do you think with all of our nation's history of segregation, people would even consider excluding one another?
Lucy: People like the idea of being a part of something that other people can't. It almost makes them feel powerful or special.
Peggy: Like girl groups?
Lucy: Yes. Like girl groups.
Peggy: Do you think that if we keep reminding one another about what segregation was really like we would all try harder not to exclude each other?
Lucy: Maybe. I am not sure.

Ways of Imagining: Sense of Identity

***Voices in the Park* written by Anthony Browne**

> It is within these literary common places that readers have opportunities to review past, present, and imagined interpretations of themselves, of others, and to contexts of experience. (Sumara, 2002, p. 29)
>
> "You get some frightful types in the park these days!" (*Voices in the Park,* Anthony Browne)

As part of an interview with Anthony Brown, CCBC writer, Tana Elias (2000, (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2000, para. 1), describes Browne as an "[i]nternationally-recognized author and illustrator of children's books, with over thirty titles to his name" (para. 1). He used his training as an illustrator to work in the medical field, illustrating human body parts and organs. He was also a greeting card illustrator for many years. Browne has received multiple awards for his picturebook stories and illustrations. He is noted for using gorillas as a part of his book illustrations and considers them fierce, yet gentle creatures. What sets Browne and his picturebooks apart from many others is made evident by his responses during an interview with Elias. When

asked about the difficulty for children to understand his writing he responded “When I hear someone say that my books are too complex for children I know that I'm hearing someone who either knows nothing about children, or someone that doesn't value children or give them credit for their abilities to understand complex ideas” (para. 6). Referring to children’s responses to one of his characters named Willy, who is actually a chimpanzee, Browne states “Willy is a chimpanzee living in a world of gorillas who are all stronger, more powerful and important than him. I think a lot of children identify with him because their lives are dominated by older siblings, parents, teachers, policemen and politicians” (para. 16). Even though Willy is not a character in *Voices in the Park*, both gorillas and monkeys are used in this picturebook to represent people who are dominated by adults, prejudice, hopelessness, and fear. The reader experiences multiple perspectives on the notion of domination by each character that tells the story.

It is here that I need to explain the storyline of *Voices in the Park*. This picturebook is based upon the story of a trip to the park told four different times, from four different perspectives. It is told from the perspectives of two different adults, the mother of a boy and the father of a girl. It is also told from the perspectives of their children; the boy and the girl. These four tell their stories through lenses colored by economic class. They tell their stories from the multiple perspectives of hegemony; as it applies to the one in power and the one who is powerless. They also tell their stories through the multiple perspectives of hope; as it applies to social relationships and prospects for a better future. In a book review of *Voices in the Park*, editor for Reading Online, which is sponsored by the International Reading Association, Linda Labbo (1998), states “The story is told through a subtle interplay among narrative, dialogue, and

illustration in four vignettes or voices." and then she goes on to note "Each character's outlook on life is expressed through changes in color hues and details in the illustrations" (para. 1).

The first telling of the trip to the park is through the perspective of the mother. She is a formidable character who expects everything and everyone to obey her commands. She is a planner and is not happy when life does not go accordingly. In order for the reader to understand how sterile and unemotional this character views life, she is not even given a name. She is referred to as "Mother". Browne depicts Mother as a large gorilla that is totally closed from the world by the use of boots, gloves, coat, scarf and hat. Mother's hat will play a significant role in my later discussion with my reading community. The second telling of the trip to the park is done by the dad. Even though the dad is much less formidable than Mother, he too is not given a name and is referred to by his daughter as "Dad" instead of "Father"; thus depicting a less formidable relationship. Dad is an unemployed painter (the reader gathers this through his paint spattered overalls) who desperately seeks a job. Browne depicts Dad as a gorilla but with human hands. It is through the illustration of the walk to and from the park that the reader understands Dad's sense of place and his sense of hopelessness. Later in this chapter, my reading community will also have much to say about how Browne uses illustration to show Dad's frustration and hopelessness.

The third perspective of the trip to the park is that of the son. He is given the name of Charles. Even though "Charles" is a name traditionally associated with power, and affluence, it actually is a German name meaning "free man" or "the gifted one" (The New Parents Guide, 2009).One wonders if Browne chose the name Charles for its formal

sound or as an ironic attempt to choose a name living opposite of its current reality. Charles's character is depicted as a monkey instead of a gorilla. Charles is very much dominated by his gorilla mother. Charles, like his mother begins his trip to the park bundled up in clothing, closed off from the weather, but as his friendship with the little girl unfolds, he is soon shed of the barriers of his coat and gloves as well as his mother's dominance.

My reading community spent most of their time pouring over Charles' perspective of the trip to the park and how Browne's illustrations tell more of the story than the actual words. Watkins (as cited in Reynolds and Webber, 2004), based upon an ethnographic study of the formal and informal educational experience of African American women determined that "[c]ommunication from and with parents as a way of acquiring critical knowledge that impacts personal and social development. Knowing what to expect in society and learning the skills to deal confidently with the real world represents valuable information to participants" (pp. 157-158). The last perspective on the trip to the park was from that of the little girl. She is given the name of "Smudge" which I would assume is a nickname thus showing the type of relationship she has with her dad. One wonders if this was also an attempt by Browne to take the literal meaning of a name, in this case "smudge" means to "smear or blur" to make a subtle attempt to show how Smudge's character actually blurs the socioeconomic lines between Charles and herself (The Free Dictionary, 2010).

Through Smudge's telling of the trip, the reader can see that even though Smudge understands her economic situation, she has not yet become colored by class difference. She only sees the mother as an uptight individual and the boy as a sissy. She refers to the

boy as “Charlie” instead of “Charles” thus refusing to accept both its traditional and literal meanings. Smudge’s character is also depicted as a monkey, not a gorilla. Smudge’s whole world view is depicted through Browne’s choice of color and even the font style of the text. This is a story that would not have been so rich if it had not been for the illustrations. Once again, these did not go unnoticed by my reading community.

My first reading of *Voices in the Park* with my small reading community elicited what one would consider typical responses in eleven year old students. “Look at that woman, she’s a gorilla!” and “Look at that woman gorilla, she looks mad!” were said in some form or another by everyone in the group. One particular boy in my reading community even said “The mother looks like a volcano that is ready to explode!” The students also made surface comments about the dad’s sadness, the little boy’s look of loneliness, and the little girl’s smile.

Because the students in my reading community live in a rural setting, they were fascinated with the idea of taking your child and pet to the city park for a walk. The actual idea of having a community park with a designated playground in which to play was also unique. There is one local playground near this community behind the public library but is not very big and is used mostly by the families who live in the city limits. One girl asked “Who takes their child on a walk?” Even though these students ride their bikes around the neighborhood, all them have to drive to get to the local ballpark and would never even consider bringing their animals. Many of them have yards big enough for their animals to roam free and have no concept of what it would be like to live in an apartment or an urban neighborhood. It was not until we put our heads together and REALLY looked at the illustrations and how they reflected the story that four particular

students in my small reading community "got the picture" of what Anthony Browne is trying to tell us through his story.

Conversation with Fallon

Fallon is the member of the group who picked up on the differences between the relationships between Mother and Charles and then Dad and Smudge. Here is a small part of our conversation on parenting.

> **Fallon:** Did you notice how Charles and his mother act different towards each other than from Smudge and her dad?
> **Peggy:** What do you mean?
> **Fallon:** Well, looking at the pictures Charles and his mother don't seem very connected. They face away from each other and they walk home in silence. Even when Charles tells the story, he looks back at the park as if he doesn't want to go home.
> **Peggy:** What about Smudge and her dad?
> **Fallon:** Smudge and her dad look like they are enjoying their walk. You can see a smile on Smudge's face. Her dad made her hot chocolate when they got home.
> **Peggy:** What does this tell you about families and relationships?
> **Fallon:** That different families have different relationships. That even though I am sure that Charles' mother loves him, she has to be in charge and tell him what to do and he has to obey to make her happy. She doesn't seem to care whether Charles is happy.
> **Peggy:** What about the other family?
> **Fallon:** For one thing, you don't have to have a lot of money to be happy as a family. Smudge and her dad seem to like each other even though they don't have a lot of money. Her dad seems to want to please her and the dog.
> **Peggy:** Do you think that Charles' mother is a "bad" mother and Smudge's dad is a "good" dad.
> **Fallon:** Not necessarily. I just wish that Charles' mother wouldn't be so stiff and let Charles play with whoever he wants to play with.
> **Peggy:** Do you think that most parents try to be good parents - even though they sometimes mess up?
> **Fallon:** Sure. I think most of them do the best they know how.
> **Peggy:** Do you think that there are children out there who have "bad" parents?
> **Fallon:** I am sure that there are. I know that there are kids whose parents don't take care of them – don't feed them and make them stay alone a lot or even do drugs right in front of them. I would consider these people "bad" parents.
> **Peggy:** What should be done about this?
> **Fallon:** I don't know. If they are doing illegal stuff, they should take the children away from their parents.
> **Peggy:** Do you know of anybody like this?

Fallon: NO! I just have heard and read about parents like this.

Just like the characters in the story Fallon's perspective on "good" parenting is based upon her own upbringing. She is the product of two parents who spend a large part of their leisure time with their children. I see them together as a family at all extra-curricular school events as well as out in the community. It has never occurred to Fallon that there might be students in our own school community or as even close as her own classroom that have what she refers to as "bad" parents. I appreciated that Fallon recognized that financial success did not always equate with happiness or that financial success did not define what makes a parent "good" or bad". I suggested to Fallon as well as the reading community that there could be students sitting right next to them in class who are hurting from Fallon's definition of "bad" parenting as well as parenting done much like that of Charles' mother.

Conversation with Charlie

It was our own Charlie who educated all of us on the differences between gorillas and monkeys as well as the different types of gorillas. He announced to the group that we should refer to the mother as a "goman" (gorilla-woman) and the man as a "gam" (gorilla-man). The group was quite willing to go along with his idea. Charlie was the first to notice how Browne used a different season as the backdrop for each person's telling of their trip to the park.

> **Charlie:** Did you notice how in each of the stories, the seasons were different?
> **Peggy:** (Flipping through the book) Well look at that! You are right. Explain what you see.
> **Charlie:** When the mother is telling the story, the season is fall. All the leaves are brown and there are leaves on the ground. It must be late fall because they are already wearing coats.
> **Peggy:** What about when the dad tells the story?

Charlie: Well, it is winter. That probably has to do with his sadness at not having a job. The "hood" where they live at first is all bare but when they are on the way home it has twinkly lights in the trees almost like they feel like celebrating after going to the park.
Peggy: How about Charles and Smudge? What seasons do they use?
Charlie: Charles's season is kind of weird. He has some that is fall but then some that is spring. When you are looking at Charles and Smudge sitting on the bench, Charles's side of the bench is all shadows but on Smudge's side of the bench is spring.
Peggy: What do you think this means?
Charlie: I'm thinking it has to do with how happy Charles is in his world versus how happy Smudge's world looks to Charlie.
Peggy: What about Smudge's outlook on her telling of the story?
Charlie: When Smudge tells the story everything is bright like the summer. All the colors are almost like a cartoon, not quite real.
Peggy: Do you think Smudge does not have a real outlook on her world?
Charlie: Maybe not. It seems that even the statues in the park are more cartoon-like and do things that wouldn't really happen.
Peggy: Why do you think Browne made the scenery reflect who was telling the story?
Charlie: Maybe just telling the story wasn't enough. You needed the pictures to really see how the characters felt about the trip to the park.
Peggy: Did the pictures help you to feel the character's mood?
Charlie: Yes! Just the scenery made you feel what the characters were feeling. I could really feel the dad's sadness by just looking at the trees.
Peggy: Would this story have been as effective if you had never seen the pictures?
Charlie: No. It would have taken a lot more words to help me to see.
Peggy: By "see" you mean understand?
Charlie: Yes.
Peggy: Do you think that we all do what the characters in the story did - which is tell our own version of an event based upon our own personality and history?
Charlie: Sure. I think everyone does. I know I do.

We went on to discuss that if Browne had added more characters to the story, there would have been even more versions of the trip to the park and each version would be based upon that character's personality and history. Through Charlie's sensitive examination of Browne's illustrations he was able to "get the picture" as to the fact that we all "see" our own particular world through our own personality and history. I suggested to the reading

community that we should all consider the way others "see" the world before we consider our own eyesight as superior.

Conversation with Hillary

Hillary was the first to notice that Charles spent his version of the trip to the park in the shadow of his mother.

> **Hillary:** (After looking at the different seasons mentioned by Charlie) Oh my gosh! Look at Charles' story! Everywhere you look you can see the shadow of his mother's hat!
> **Peggy:** I see what you mean. Why do you think they are there?
> **Hillary:** I think it is because Charles can never get out from underneath his mother's shadow. The hats are everywhere just like his mother's influence.
> **Peggy:** Did you notice that even on the pages with no hats, Charles is under a cloud or shadow of some kind?
> **Hillary:** Yes! Like he can never get away from his mother! When he is with Smudge he kind of forgets but then his mother just calls him back and makes him leave.
> **Peggy:** Why do you think she is so controlling?
> **Hillary:** I think she thinks she is protecting him from people not like him but in the end she is only making him sad.
> **Peggy:** Do you think we need to be protected from people not like us?
> **Hillary:** I mean I can see our parents wanting to take care of us but not to let us play with someone who might be a little different is wrong.
> **Peggy:** Have you ever not been allowed to play with someone in your neighborhood because they were "different".
> **Hillary:** Not me. I actually don't have kids my age in the neighborhood to play with but I am allowed to play with anyone from school. There have been some bad teenagers who park their cars at the end of my street and smoke. My sisters and I are definitely banned from this group.
> **Peggy:** Do you and your sisters resent your parents' rule about this?
> **Hillary:** No! Those kids are only going to get in trouble. My mom has threatened to call the police to make them move.
> **Peggy:** Would this be embarrassing?
> **Hillary:** No. They need to go somewhere else.

Like Charles, Hillary lives in the shadow of her parents' influence, especially her mother's influence, both explicit and implicit. As mentioned earlier, Hilary is the center of her family's universe and even though she is at the center she certainly feels the gravitational pull of her upbringing and the example set by her mother. Unlike Charles,

Hilary is quite happy with her parents' expectations and boundaries. Based upon our conversation, I interpret that Hillary recognizes that her parents' expectations and boundaries are for her own good and protection. She trusts that they will make the right choices to keep her safe and will discern between someone who is a bad influence and someone who is considered "other". So far, neither Hillary nor her parents have had to test her confidence because within her school community students who are a bad influence and even considered "other" are rare. I suggested to Hillary as well as our reading community that we all live in the shadow of the influence of others. This shadow is created predominantly by the authority figures in our lives. I pointed out the fact that even as an adult I live in the shadow of influence; from my past and my present. It is up to me to recognize those shadows and to either choose to live under the shadows or dispel them for good.

Conversation with Jake

Jake's sensitivity to small details allowed him to notice a second story taking place in the background of each page in the book.

> **Jake:** Did you notice that there seems to be something extra happening on each page besides the story?
> **Peggy:** What do you mean?
> **Jake:** (Jake turns each page and points to the details) If you look at the background of the pages when the mother is telling the story, you can see stuff like a queen walking, a shadow of an alligator, crying trees, and even a tree on fire.
> **Peggy:** Yes, I do see this. The first time I read this story, I didn't even notice these things.
> **Jake:** (warming to his subject) Look at the background when the dad is telling the story. On the way to the park you can see broken hearts, frowning sidewalk pictures, and even smoke coming from a nuclear smoke stack. On the way home when he is feeling better these same areas now look happy. The pictures have come to life and are dancing, there is a shooting star, the light post is a flower, and the buildings have hearts in the windows.

Peggy: Before we talk about it, tell me what you see in the background of the boy and then the girl.
Jake: We have already sort of looked at their backgrounds but if you look closely at the pictures, there is more stuff happening.
Peggy: What stuff?
Jake: Stuff like people playing together in the background at the park while the boy stands alone. In the background of Smudge's story there are lollipop colored smokestacks and light poles, fruit shaped trees, Santa hats on light poles, and fireworks. She even sees a mote around Charles's house as she thinks about his walk home. Her cocoa cup has a memory of the trip to the park painted on it.
Peggy: Wow that was a lot! What do you think all of these images means?
Jake: I think it is another way of telling us how these characters feel. Like their inner feelings that they don't even know about?
Peggy: Like your subconscious?
Jake: Yes, I think Browne is showing us their attitudes, sadness, happiness, frustration, and all by using the background of the stories.
Peggy: So, the dancing, shooting stars, flowers growing that happen on the dad's way home from the park as opposed to what was happening on the way to the park lets the reader know that the dad is feeling better about his life?
Jake: Yes. Smudge's seeing the mote around Charles's house tells us that she understands that he won't be able to see her anymore but the scene on her cocoa mug tells that reader that Smudge understands that she has her memories even if she can't play with Charles anymore.
Peggy: Wow, Jake. That was great. You really got a handle on the story. Do you think that if we could read people's minds we could see extra stories going on?
Jake: I think so.
Peggy: Do you think these background stories would change as the person or their situation changes, just like the dad's did?
Jake: I would think so.
Peggy: So basically our background stories (subconscious) continually changes as our attitude, situation, mood, outlook, etc. changes?
Jake: Yes.

Jake's sensitivity to the detail in the background of the story affirmed what I already knew about Jake. As I stated earlier, Jake is very sensitive not only to his own feelings but to the feeling of others. Jake tuned right in to the fact that Browne used the background of each illustration to portray the feelings of the characters in the book. He recognized that the background detail depended on which character was telling the story and that character's feelings at the time. The read-aloud community and I discussed that even though we now recognize that our personality and history can affect the way we

perceive our world, our inner feelings, of which we may not even be aware, can affect the way we perceive our world as well. We then talked about how knowing that there are multiple ways to perceive the world can heighten our sensitivity to our own feelings as well as the feelings of others.

Closing Discussion

In our closing discussion about *Voices in the Park* I asked the group what they thought the various conversations that we had about the book meant to them personally. Many of the students in the group replied that "Everyone sees things differently" and "There are two sides to every story". We then discussed that everyone tells a story based upon how they see the event. We talked about how even in an argument each side thinks they are right because of their perspective of the event. We talked about wars between countries, lawsuits, and even arguments between friends. I asked the group how these ideas connect to their future. Several of them indicated that they would stop and think about how others see their version of a story before reacting.

Another aspect from the book that was mentioned was "People should not judge others by what they look like or how much money they have". It was discussed that the practice of judging others can be learned through avenues such as the media, which includes print and Internet advertizing, movies, and TV shows. We learn to judge others from our peers and even our family community. We talked about how each of us would try very hard in the future to accept others for themselves and not what they have or do not have. We also talked about learning to be critical of the messages about judging others that come our way through the media.

Finally, we talked about hope. It was discussed that like Smudge and her dad, even though your life sometimes seems sad, there are ways to be happy. Several students made the comment "Having money does not always make you happy but being with someone you care about does". It was agreed upon that people should not worry so much about being rich in money but rich with family and friends. We talked about how having someone who cares about you fills you with hope that things will get better

It seems that we spent many hours discussing *Voices in the Park.* We filled our time rereading passages from the story and pouring over the illustrations multiple times as well as arguing Browne's intent. Based upon our conversations and the personal reflections of the students, I found that many of them have a better sense of their own identity and a new found respect for the identity of others. More importantly, they have discovered that hope is the basis for imagining a world where difference is celebrated instead of feared.

Ways to Imagine: Possibilities For the Future

***The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland and Illustrated by Tatsuro Kiuchi**

> No matter how ugly the mud or how long the seed lies dormant, the bloom will be beautiful. (The Lotus Seed, 1993, Garland)

As one reads *The Lotus Seed* it would be easy to become caught up in the beauty of the paintings and the poetic language forgetting that this book is a fictive account of a real event. Sherry Garland (n.d.) tells in her autobiography "After the Vietnam War, thousands of Vietnamese families moved into the Houston area, bringing with them their culture and customs. I befriended many families and helped them with problems unique to war refugees." (para. 14). It was from her exposure to the Vietnamese culture that

sparked her interest in learning more about the history of Vietnam and the subsequent writing of seven books, both fiction and non-fiction, about the country.

The Lotus Seed is told from the perspective of a granddaughter about her grandmother's life. It is overwhelming to think about how much the grandmother (referred to as Bà in the story) experienced in her lifetime. At the beginning of the story we know that she is living under the communist rule of Ho Chi Minh in Korea. Because Bà lived near the royal palace, she had the extraordinary opportunity to witness the sorrow of the emperor the day he abdicated his throne. Bà had the foresight to recognize that life would never be the same after this day, so she took a lotus seed from the imperial garden as a memento. History tells us that Bà was correct; Korea became embattled in a violent civil war and Bà, her children, and the lotus seed all found their way to America leaving family, friends, and possessions behind.

It was in America that the family lived the typical life of a first generation immigrant; long hours of work, cramped living conditions, and the sense of not belonging. Tragically, several years later, besides her children, Bà lost the only connection that she had to her homeland when her grandson planted the lotus seed in the mud behind their house and then forgot where he planted it. Miraculously, several months later Bà discovered that the lotus seed had grown into a lotus plant with a beautiful bloom. It is here that both the reader and the children in the story come to understand the importance of valuing our history but also taking care of the future.

Conversation with Mario

When we finished reading *The Lotus Seed,* I asked my reading community about the metaphor of the mud and the seed. I was pleasantly surprised that several of them

interpreted this metaphor about how good things can come from bad if you are willing to wait patiently.

> **Peggy:** Just think about the grandmother, Bà, in the story. Think about all that she had been through in her lifetime. Think about how far she had traveled. Think about all of her loss. I don't know if I could have suffered as much as she did. During the story did you wonder if anything good was ever going to happen to Bà?
> **Mario:** I wondered that several times.
> **Peggy:** What was the ultimate loss for Bà?
> **Mario:** When her grandson planted her lotus seed in the mud and forgot where he planted it.
> **Peggy:** The poor woman had to leave everything behind in Vietnam except for her children and the lotus seed only to have it planted and lost. Why do you think Sherry Garland chose to write a story using a lotus seed of all flowers to connect the lives of a group of people who sought refuge in our country?
> **Mario:** It was after you told us exactly how the lotus seed is grown that I saw why Sherry Garland used it.
> **Peggy:** How is it grown?
> **Mario:** It has to be grown in the swampy mud.
> **Peggy:** Think about the message of the story. What could the swampy mud represent?
> **Mario:** All of the hardships that Bà faced.
> **Peggy:** What about us? What about the many groups of people in our past? Think about some of the books that we have read these past weeks.
> **Mario:** The mud could represent the troubles we go through every day; sickness, disease, divorce, death, and other things. It could also mean the hardships faced by the slaves, by the people of the Holocaust, and by the blacks who were segregated from whites.
> **Peggy:** Yes. Think about the lotus seed. It is this little round, tough thing that under the right conditions can sprout in a few days. Under the wrong conditions, it can lay doing nothing for years until the right conditions come along. Explain this in terms of all the stories we have read.
> **Mario:** The wrong conditions could be the time that all of the bad things in our past were taking place. Nothing beautiful could grow as long as slavery was allowed to happen. Nothing beautiful could grow as long as the Holocaust was allowed to happen. Or even when people still had an attitude that one race was better than the other.
> **Peggy:** Great, Mario. Now explain the right conditions that will make the seed grow.
> **Mario:** I would think that the right conditions would be when slavery was abolished and people admitted that it was wrong or when segregation was outlawed.
> **Peggy:** How could we keep the seed growing today? Keep it from going to "sleep" in the mud.

Mario: We could respect each other for who we are. We should take care of each other and stand up for one another.
Peggy: Think about some of the social issues we read about.
Mario: Oh, we should think about the people who come to our country and have a hard time speaking English looking for work. We should treat them with respect. We should try to understand what it like to be homeless and not think they are all homeless for the same reasons.
Peggy: What about the environmental issues we read about?
Mario: We should remember that the little things we do like not drive our cars so much or planting new trees can make a difference with the prices of things as well as make the future better.
Peggy: Wow, Mario, you remembered all the picturebooks that we read. Explain what happens after the lotus seed sprouts.
Mario: It puts out shoots, then leaves, and then a flower.
Peggy: Kind of like the way caring and respect work?
Mario: (*Thinking a second or two*) Yes. Little by little things just grow better.
Peggy: It is amazing how much more beautiful the world can be with a little care and respect.
Peggy: Because this is not a true story, don't you think it is neat how Sherry Garland took a terrible event in Vietnam's history, connected it with a beautiful native plant that grows from the mud to remind us what is possible for us?

Appelemando's Dreams **Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco**

For him, dreams were magic chariots pulled though his mind by galloping hues of color. For him, dreaming was a way of life. (*Appelemando's Dreams*, 1991, Patricia Polacco)

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." **(**Quote from Eleanor Roosevelt)

The future is about dreams. Some children are encouraged to dream, some children are never given the opportunity to dream, some children are discouraged from dreaming, and some children are so discouraged they do not see a point to dreaming. *Appelemando's Dreams* is about the child who is discouraged from dreaming by the adults in his world but he chooses to dream, anyway. Fortunately for Appelemando, he has four good and true friends who encourage him to dream despite the ridicule he receives. Patricia Polacco, once again, displays her skills as a storyteller and illustrator to

warn her readers as to what can happen when we stop believing in our dreams. Fortunately, she also tells us what can happen when we do dare to dream.

At the beginning of *Appelemando's Dreams*, the boy, Appelemando, is seen wandering through the village. As he passes by the villagers, they each stop and stare while scorning the fact that Appelemando spends most of his day dreaming instead of working. Appelemando is encouraged to dream by his four friends because they possess the ability to see his dreams unlike the adults in the village. As the story progresses Appelemando's friends devise a way to capture his dreams. His dreams adhere to anything that is wet. This works well for the small group until the whole village becomes wet from rain. Appelemando's dreams end up covering all of the walls and storefronts of the town. Of course, people who do not believe in dreams also do appreciate the beauty of dreams covering every inch of their town.

Consequently, Appelemando is brought before the elders in the town and asked to dream at their command. When Appelemando is unable to bring forth a dream, all of the children are punished for their actions. Because they are so discouraged from their ordeal with the town elders, the children become lost in the woods on their way home from town. Their only hope is for Appelemando to send up a beautiful dream for the villagers to see. Appelemando remembering only the bitter words of the townspeople is still unable to dream. It was not until he focuses on the people who matter the most in his life and who believe in him that he is able to bring forth a beautiful dream. As a result, the townspeople follow Appelemando's dreams and save the children. The story ends with a very old Appelemando dreaming by the fountain in the square as the colors of his imagination swirl all around.

Conversation with Hillary

I believe that Polacco's purpose for Appelemando's Dream is two-fold. I believe its first intent is to encourage young readers to never allow anyone to discourage them from their dreams. I also believe that Polacco's second purpose is to caution the adults who have read this book aloud to countless children as to the consequences of never allowing children the opportunity to dream or even worse, the consequences of discouraging children from dreaming. I am not sure that because my small reading community was filled with creative dreamers or that they had become more adept at discerning the meaning of the picturebooks we were reading but the insight they provided as to Polacco's intent was both sensitive and encouraging for me as an educator.

Peggy: Explain the concept of dreaming.
Hillary: There are several kinds of dreaming.
Peggy: What are they?
Hillary: There is dreaming like you do at night. You are not in control of these. They just happen. Sometimes they are funny, sad, or even scary.
Peggy: Were these the kind that Appelemando had?
Hillary: No. His dreaming happened when he was awake.
Peggy: So what kind of dreaming did Appelemando do?
Hillary: I am thinking he did the other two kinds of dreaming. Daydreaming and wishing.
Peggy: Daydreaming?
Hillary: Yes, daydreaming. This is when you think beautiful thoughts about things. This is when you imagine the world as a beautiful place. That's why all those beautiful things came out of his head.
Peggy: Why did the townspeople not like this?
Hillary: Because they did not know how to make beautiful thoughts so they didn't want anyone else to have them either.
Peggy: Don't you think that it was odd that even though Appelemando's friends believed in his dreams, they were incapable of making these beautiful pictures themselves?
Hillary: Yes. I wondered about that. I guess it was just his gift. Sort of like we need to appreciate someone's gift instead of thinking they are odd.
Peggy: Was Appelemando like the town artist?
Hillary: Yes, that's it. He was the one to turn the drab town beautiful with his thoughts and then someone else would make beautiful music and on and on.

Peggy: Basically, every community needs its share of dreamers in order to us to have paintings, stories, music, poetry, sculpture, buildings, etc.?
Hillary. Yes, that's it.
Peggy: Do you think that we often discourage these people like the town did?
Hillary: They often find it hard to make a living and not much time is spent on it at school.
Peggy: Tell me about the third kind dreaming that you mentioned.
Hillary: It didn't come right out and say it but I kind of thought that another kind of dreaming would be dreaming about the future. This would be making plans about growing up.
Peggy: So you think that this book could have been a metaphor for having dreams for the future?
Hillary: Yes, when the townspeople were mad at Appelemando for dreaming, he and his friends became lost, and then they couldn't find their way back. The townspeople could not find them.
Peggy: So you are saying that dreams save you from what?
Hillary: Having dreams for the future keeps you from getting lost or I guess losing hope and not doing anything. You shouldn't let people take away your dreams.
Peggy: Even if they might be unrealistic?
Hillary: Even that. Most of the time a person figures it out. Grownups shouldn't tell a kid that it is impossible to be an actress or even the president.
Peggy: I like that you found multiple meanings in this story. Do you have any dreams like Appelemando?
Hillary: Yes, but I don't want to tell them.
Peggy: Are you worried someone will try to take them away?
Hillary: Maybe.

I found it interesting that Hillary discovered more than I did about Appelemando's dream. I saw only the metaphor in the story for both the student and the teacher. I never stopped to think about the message that this book had for the arts. I often learned more from my reading community than they learned from me. There is something to be said for an untainted perspective.

Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust by Eve Bunting and Illustrated by Stephen Gammell

> "But the Terrible Things don't need a reason. Just mind your business, Little Rabbit. We don't want them to get mad at us." (1989, *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, Eve Bunting)

> Surely, education today must be conceived as a mode of opening the world to critical judgments by the young and to their imaginative projections and, in time, to their transformative actions. (Greene, 1995, p. 56)

Once again Eve Bunting has created a picturebook that goes beyond entertainment. *Terrible Things* much like *A Day's Work* and *Fly Away Home* challenges the reader to question the events and social practices of what society has either considered acceptable or has chosen not to acknowledge in hopes that they will fade silently into the past. Unlike *A Day's Work* and *Fly Away Home*, that are told using realistic fiction, Bunting describes what happened in many European communities during the Holocaust through the use of allegory.

As I have mentioned many times in this dissertation, my reading community lives in a world far removed from the necessity to stand up to violent ethnic cleansing but my reading community is not so removed from the necessity to stand up for not only each other within the reading community but for the weaker students within the whole school community. In my school career, I have seen friendships torn apart because one friend refused to stand up for the other. I have also seen students turn their backs when another student was being bullied in order not to cause confrontation. *Terrible Things* provides the opportunity for students to see what happens when a community does not come together to stand against outside forces that could tear it apart. Noddings (as cited in Ayers & Miller, 1987) states "But when we look at a scene of suffering and see both possibilities for ourselves, then a new horror is aroused, and that horror provides a starting point for real growth" (p. 168).

Terrible Things begins with the forest being shared by many small creatures. Each one different in its own way but all willing to share and were content. I would venture to

say that they all probably consider themselves good friends. Of course, that was until the Terrible Things come. At this point, one by one they begin to turn their backs on one another in order to save themselves. They also begin to rationalize the removal of each animal as well. One by one, the Terrible Things take away each forest creature until all that is left is Big Rabbit and Little Rabbit. Big Rabbit is confident that the superiority of the white rabbit race will keep it safe. Unfortunately, this is not the case and Big Rabbit, too, is taken away by the Terrible Things. Only Little Rabbit is left because he was hiding among the rocks. At this point in the story, Little Rabbit realizes the mistakes that the forest community had made and wonders if they had all stuck together would the outcome have been different. More importantly, Little Rabbit decides to act upon his mistakes and chooses to spread his message hoping that someone will listen.

Eve Bunting is a mistress of words. Stephen Gammell, a Caldecott Award winning author, is a master of illustration. His illustrations that accompany the storyline of *Terrible Things* are equal to Bunting's prose. During his career, Gammell has illustrated more than fifty children's books. Many of the picturebooks that he has illustrated are some of the favorites in my library. Gammell states "My desire is that it happens for me in much the same way it happens to whoever will be looking at the book. When I am working on the book, it's for me and for you. When the book is done, it's mostly for you. Does it work? Only you can say" (Looking Glass Reviews, 2010, para. 4). I would have to say that all of Gammell's many picturebooks that are on the shelf in my library "work" for anyone who reads them.

Several of Gammell's picturebooks, using only black and white, contain macabre illustrations to depict horrible or even deathly events. It is this type of illustration that is

used in *Terrible Things.* What is interesting to note is that Gammell never actually shows the Terrible Things that take away the animals, one by one. Each time they come, there is a churning of claws, nets, clouds, and spirals. The reader can never define what exactly the Terrible Things represent. It is almost as if Gammell is creating pictorial allegory through the use of indefinable images. My reading community was very much affected by Bunting's allegory. However, they were just as affected by Gammell's illustrations. In fact, we spent just as much time examining and speculating about Gammell's depiction of the Terrible Things as we did the meaning of Bunting's allegory.

Conversation with Charlie

> **Peggy:** Before we discuss that text of the story, let's visit the illustrations. You all seem to be obsessed with figuring out the terrible things. What is it that you see in the illustration that tells you about them?
> **Charlie:** I cannot really tell. In the first picture you can sort of see this hand thing, the next time you see this sort of claw, then you sort of see nets and swirls, then you see ocean waves, then flames, then eyes, and finally this smoke stuff. Everything is very vague or murky.
> **Peggy:** So you can see stuff but on the other hand you cannot?
> **Charlie:** That's right. It is almost as if the illustrator doesn't want you to see exactly what the terrible things are. They could be anything.
> **Peggy:** I know that while I was reading you all kept trying to identify what creature the terrible things represent but it was impossible, correct.
> **Charlie:** That's right. You never could tell because they kept changing.
> **Peggy:** Could the illustrations possibly be an allegory, much like the story?
> **Charlie:** That's it! The illustrator doesn't want us to guess what the terrible things are because terrible things could be anything!
> **Peggy:** I see what you mean, Charlie. How does this connect with the story?
> **Charlie:** Well, each time the different creatures were taken no one stepped forward to help. You never knew which ones would be next or why, just like you never knew what form the terrible things would take when they came.
> **Peggy:** So what lesson can be learned from this?
> **Charlie:** We never know when we will need to stand up for our friends or who will be the ones to hurt our friends but we need to be ready.
> **Peggy:** That was very insightful, Charlie. Why do you think Gammell chose to draw all of the pictures in black and white?
> **Charlie:** Maybe because the subject is so serious or maybe because death was involved. You know a lot of movies with evil are kind of dark.
> **Peggy:** Now that you mention it, you are right.

> **Peggy:** Why do you think that Eve Bunting allowed even the white rabbits to be taken away? I would have thought that at least they would have been saved and the story could end with them bragging about their superiority.
> **Charlie:** I see what you mean but I think she let them be taken because it shows us that no one is really superior and we all could be gone before we know it if we don't stick together.
> **Peggy:** Why Charlie, I think Little Rabbit would be pleased.
>
> This particular session with my reading community was like a free-for-all.

Because they were all trying to figure out the identity of the terrible things, I worried that the significance of the allegory would be lost on them. My exchange with Charlie, after I finally finished the story and settled down the group, reassured me that they had been listening and that the message of the allegory had made an impact on my reading community. I think that Little Rabbit would be pleased with all of them.

CHAPTER VI

THE POWER OF THE PICTUREBOOK: SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSIONS

> True knowing means transformation and change, and it is that level of learning that I hope for but often find difficult to offer as a possibility for children. (Gallas, 1994, p. 138)

In this final chapter, inspired by the work of Karen Gallas (1994, 2003), I look beyond the conversations that I shared with my reading community. My reading community was composed of ten middle-class, gifted fifth grade students; seven white and three bi-racial. Through the use of written and creative expression, my reading community chose a medium/performance that allowed each of them to show the significance a particular picturebook held for them. Written expression was in the form of a journal kept by each reading community member. After each reading session, the reading community would take a few minutes and share their thoughts and concerns about the picturebook(s) that were read. Creative expression was in the form of dance, video, collage, book making, poetry, and painting. The reading community chose to express their feelings about their chosen picturebook, give their interpretation of a particular picturebook, or to recreate the story in another medium/performance.

Lastly, in this chapter, I share my reflections on this research inquiry and what implications, if any, it had on my reading community as well as me. I discuss five findings that surfaced during my study: (1) Not only does the picturebook have the power to affect the listeners of the reading community, it has the power to affect the reader as well. (2) Reading communities within the school have the potential to provide a safe-environment in which students can come together to read, discuss, and reflect on literature that will enable them to imagine the past, question the present, and find

possibility in the future. (3) Children who lead an almost idyllic life living happily within the dominant culture do not see the need to question and change the status quo. Children, who find no connection to the atrocities committed in the past, do not see the need to understand in order to change the future. Children, who are mirrored in the literature that is available to them, do not often look beyond their reflection for something different to read. Children who are content with their present do not often worry about the future. (4) Reconceptualizing the way we read aloud to our students can cultivate new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and imagining. By reading aloud both critically and aesthetically towards a curriculum of imagination, the reading community can come to terms with its sense of identity and imagine the possibilities of the future. (5) Educators and parents must seek to provide children with historically accurate, socially conscious, and real world connected picturebooks in addition to the mandated, state-adopted textbook, to begin the conversation that will help them seek to understand, to question, and then seek to change status quo.

Significance

> We see; we hear; we make connections. (Greene, 1995, p. 186)

One by one the members of my reading community came to identify with at least one of the picturebooks that we read. What I found interesting is that at our last reading session, when I made the request that they each choose a picturebook that held particular significance for them, many of them did not choose the picturebook that I would have chosen for them based upon our conversations. The lesson in this for me as a researcher was that even though my reading community was forthcoming with their opinions and

observations, what they internalized during our time together and its impact upon their lived-experience was only for each of them to know.

One of the difficulties that my reading community had with my request was that I did not put any restrictions on them as to what I wanted. I could tell that these students were not used to working without a rubric telling them exactly what would be necessary in order for them to fulfill the "assignment". Mastery has become the all important bar that must be reached in order for a student to be considered educated. Mastery requires a set of minimum requirements. My reading community was desperate for minimum requirements. Giving them carte blanche in order to interpret, retell, rebut, or recreate a picturebook was almost more than they could bear. However, once my reading community realized that my request was not tied to mastery, a grade, or even a reward, they settled down to their commission.

Mario.

When Mario brought his creative project, a brief picturebook, to my office I had no idea as to which picturebook he had chosen. As I mentioned in an earlier description of Mario; he is a very sensitive, creative young man who is quite the thinker. Because he is quiet, it is often hard to tell what he is thinking. Because he always wears a pleasant expression on his face, it is also hard to tell when he is troubled or angry. I would almost guess that he is not often plagued with the latter emotion. After examining his creative effort, I discovered a depth of emotion that Mario does not share every day.

Mario's picturebook was his interpretation of the allegory told in *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*. Upon examination of his illustrations, one can see Mario's potential as an artist. (See figure 1) His cover page follows the lead of Steven Gammell's

illustrations. Mario drew the image of the little rabbit in the story. He also drew shadows behind the little rabbit, to warn the reader of the ominous events to come in his picturebook. Thinking back to W.J.T. Mitchells' idea of Picture Theory, one can see that Mario's pictures are "[v]ery peculiar and paradoxical creatures, both concrete and abstract, both a specific individual thing and a symbolic form that embraces a totality" (Mitchell, 2005, p. xvii). The beholder can see the white rabbit and recognize that this is a character in the story but it is the shadows that sum up the message behind the story.

Mario's picturebook proceeds to connect what he has learned about the Holocaust from his social studies textbook and what he has come to understand from the picturebook, *Terrible Things*. Doll (2000) discussing the use of the story, as opposed to the textbook, explains "It *(the story)* is alien, often terrifying; different, often embarrassing; strange, often unbelievable" (p. 29). Mario's picturebook illuminates his understanding of the terrifying, embarrassing, and unbelievable events that took place in our not so distant past. His insightful use of historical facts to interpret the allegory shows us that what took place during the Holocaust reached far beyond European soil.

I find it interesting that Mario uses the phrase "No one had a clue" to explain why other countries did not stop the Nazi's any sooner. (See Figure 1) In an earlier discussion that I had with Mario and Fallon, they were adamant that the United States was unaware of the full extent of Hitler's annihilation of human lives. After careful reflection of why they would defend the United States with such fervor, I realized that they had responded exactly the way I described them at the beginning of my dissertation; middle-class, white students having no connection with events beyond their own world, who trust the school textbook for their knowledge of the outside world. I find it ironic that Mario's choice of

phrase, in his mind, was a way to forgive the rest of the world, the U.S. included, for their lack of response and action, when not having a "clue" is often used as a derogatory term for those being so self-involved that they miss what is happening around them. I would like to think that Mario may have used this phrase, subliminally, to show that he is at the threshold of his own critical journey.

Affirming my aspirations for Mario, he sums up the significance that the picturebook by writing: "What did Hitler have against the Jews? What did they do wrong? None, I can assure you." (See Figure 1) Here is where I see that Mario has begun to think critically about the Holocaust. He assures his audience that he has examined the evidence; from what he has learned in school, from the stories he has read, from the influences of family and community, and his own beliefs; and has reached a verdict of "not guilty". Mario ends his picturebook with a message for us all, "But what could we do to stop this? Well, for one thing, we could end prejudice. After that, the next step would be to get along with <u>everybody,</u> like a great, big family" (See Figure 1). Mario imagined and questioned his past and then sought a way to change his future.

Jake.

Jake's creative expression actually served two purposes. In his art class, he was assigned a figure study in which he drew several figures. Part of the assignment was to make them alike but also different. He colored three of the figures only slightly different but colored one of the figures significantly different. (See figure 2) He then presented this art piece in our school's annual art show.

The morning after the art show, Jake came to my office with the same print and asked me what did I see in his work? Of course, I pointed out the figure that was

significantly different. Jake then wanted me to notice where the figure was placed within the line of figures. I indicated that the figure that was different was placed within the other figures and not on the outside. Jake, looking pleased, asked me what I thought he was trying to say in the art. I then understood why Jake had brought his art piece to me.

Jake wanted his art piece to represent his interpretation of one of the picturebooks. He then went on to explain that his art piece was a representation of the desegregation that occurred in the picturebook, *Grandmama's Pride*. The message found in his art piece is that in some way we are all different, sometimes even significantly different, but we all belong together. Without words, Jake reflected his attitudes and beliefs about our relationships with one another. His use of art to send this message reminds one about what Mitchell is trying to say about pictures. He states, "Vision is as important as language in mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the 'sign' or to discourse" (p. 47). What Jake said in his art piece was worth more than a thousand words.

Chip.

Instead of examining and writing about Chip's creative expression, I chose to write about one of his journal entries. As I mentioned in an earlier section of this dissertation, conversations with Chip usually ended at an impasse. Chip is quite the charmer and also quite the expert in the art of debate. During our picturebook conversations, I allowed Chip to share his views on social issues and then proceeded to steer him into examining his beliefs and then considering other ideas. Greene explains "This insight surely points to the importance of our freeing children to tell their stories, not only so that we can hear them but so that they can make meaningful the birth of their

own rationality" (1995, p. 54). Jake's rationality was grounded in the beliefs that he heard at home and church community.

After each reading session I wondered if Chip had even considered an alternative to his views. After examining his journal entry (See Figure 3) about the book *Fly Away Home*, I found small glimmers of possibility but also found that Chip remained fairly resolute in his opinions. The first journal entry in Figure 3 is what I asked the students to write before we began the story. I had asked them to explain what it means to be homeless. Chip explained the idea from a child's perspective. He used phrases such as "not have parents" and "not having someone who loves". It almost seemed as if he was equating homelessness to being an orphan.

The second journal entry in Figure 3 is what I asked my reading community to write after we read the picturebook, *Fly Away Home*. I asked them to create a diamante poem about homelessness. Basically, a diamante is a seven line poem, shaped like a diamond containing specific directions as to what part of speech should be on each line. Usually the diamante starts with a specific topic and gradually changes to the opposite topic at the other end. In this case, the topics were homeless and home.

The words that Chip chose to use in his diamante were of specific interest to me. He began at the homeless end of the spectrum by using words such as "lonely", "poor", "beg" "sneak". On line 4, which is basically the turning point of the poem; half of the line refers to the beginning and the other half refers to the end, Chip did not exactly follow the diamante formula but he used the word "depressed" and then the word "dog". Of course, one would consider owning a dog a part of having a home. He then gradually finishes the poem using the words like "work", "eat", "happy", and "loved". These would indicate

that Chip still associated being happy and being loved with having a home. I wonder if I should have used another word besides "home" to sit at the opposite of homeless because I think Chip was thinking about his own home and not the idea of being able to afford a place to live.

Fallon.

Fallon was the first in the reading community to ask if she really could choose a song and then choreograph a dance for her creative expression. In her usual effusive personality, she was able to make an instant connection between several of the picturebooks that we read and songs that were currently popular on the radio. What is impressive is that she could sing snippets of multiple songs to make the connection. It was not necessary for her that the entire song fit perfectly with a picturebook. Fallon even assisted Tina and Maria in choosing a song that connected with the picturebook that they wanted to use.

I was not surprised that Fallon chose the song, *Just A Girl*, performed by Miley Cyrus, one of pop culture's latest icons, to connect with her picturebook. Fallon's personality is a lot like Miley Cyrus' TV character, Hannah Montana. As mentioned in an earlier section, Fallon's goal is to become a famous actress. What is a surprise is the depth of insight she used to choose part of the lyrics of the song. Even though *Just A Girl* is about a girl caught up in being famous, realizes her mistakes, and is determined to change, Fallon explained that part of the lyrics can represent the emotion expressed by the boy in the picturebook, *Fly Away Home.* Fallon explained that she chose the song for the line, "You give me my wings so I can fly, I can fly, yeah, yeah, yeah" (Brown & Gad, 2009). She was quick to point out that the lines in the lyrics:

> It's so easy to forget what really matters in this life
> It's so hard to live with regrets, but a promise I will try
> To be better me (to be a better me), from now on
> I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do wrong.

did not imply that you have to do something wrong to be homeless. Fallon wanted to show that the picturebook had made an impression on her understanding of this issue. She also explained that these lyrics could represent society's regret for not understanding the issues of immigration and homelessness and its lack of concern. Rosenblatt explains Fallon's response to the picturebook, *Fly Away Home*, by stating "He *(the teacher)* must be ready to face the fact that the students' reactions will inevitably be in the terms of their own temperament" (p. 50). I decided to step back and allow Fallon to follow through with her plan.

Fallon came to school the day we filmed her project with several wardrobe possibilities. She brought multi-colored material to either create butterfly wings or blue material to create blue-bird wings. She either wanted to show the metaphor of the life-cycle of a butterfly (society's attitude change) or to literally represent the bird in the story (escaping homelessness). In the end, she chose a combination of both. Fallon's dance served to bring together the message of hope in the book, *Fly Away Home* and the message of the song, *Just A Girl*.

Hillary.

Hillary is known for being the peacemaker in our reading community. Knowing this fact, explained the motivation behind her journal entry (See Figure 4) after we read the picturebook, *The Lotus Seed.* I asked the reading community to think about the importance of the seed in the story. I suggested that they use the metaphor of a seed to

create a picture along with text that would help someone to imagine how peace can grow. Hillary chose to draw a live oak tree from her seed.

Upon discussion, Hillary indicated that she considered a live oak tree one of the strongest of trees and that there were several live oak trees in the Savannah area that were hundreds of years old. She explained that a live oak tree was long lasting as well as sturdy. She also explained that a live oak tree had green leaves all year long, which would be another sign that the live oak is a good choice. Upon the leaves, she used words such as “peace”, “kind”, “no wars, and “no fighting”. She basically, used a combination of words that could be considered either local peacemaking words, “kind” and “no fighting” and global words, “peace” and “no wars”. As mentioned in a previous section, Hillary is the youngest of three girls. Her sisters are both in their teens. Hillary has a real world connection with creating peace at home.

What is noteworthy is that she chose to anchor her tree with roots. Beside these roots she placed phrases such as “put others first”, “walk away from fights”, and “include others”. All of these are phrases that could be associated with peacemaking at a local level. When I discussed this possibility with her, Hillary indicated to me that peacemaking needed to start at home before it could be enacted in the world. I considered that a fair enough observation. Smiling, I told her that I would remind her of her journal entry the next time she shared a sister conflict with us during our reading time together. In her usual easy going manner, she told me that I had a good idea.

Tina & Maria.

With assistance from Fallon, Tina and Maria chose to dance together. As noted in an earlier section, Tina and Maria are very close. One girl does not visit my office

without the other. Also, as mentioned in a previous section, Tina is the member of the reading community who was diagnosed with a neuromuscular condition. She leaves school early one day each week to receive treatments that have miraculously enabled her to stay active and have lessened her pain. I was very surprised that Tina felt up to the challenge to spend the time practicing, and then, performing with Maria. In fact, they practiced after school the week preceding their performance for at least two hours. With encouragement from me to take frequent breaks, Tina was able to hold her own next to Maria. Like Fallon, they came to school ready to perform complete with costumes and ideas.

Tina and Maria chose to use the song, *Party in the U.S.A*. performed by Miley Cyrus to connect with the picturebook, *Voices in the Park.* Teaching at an elementary school and being the mother of girls, I was very familiar with this song. Even with understanding that this song was about a girl, nervous about being out of her element, who only felt at home when listening to her favorite song, I was skeptical about how they would connect this pop song sensation to a book about identity. It was only after my discussion with Tina, Maria, and Fallon that I understood that it does not matter whether one is middle, class and white, biracial, or disabled, feeling that one does not belong plagues everyone. Along with the ever creative Fallon, the girls quoted from the song "My tummys turnin' and I'm feelin' kinda home sick. Too much pressure and I'm nervous" (J. Cornish, L. Gottwald, & C. Kelly, 2009), to explain that this girl came to L.A. feeling good about herself but because she was different she was made to feel bad. To prove their point about feeling out of place, Tina and Maria quote:

Get to the club in my taxi cab
Everybody's lookin' at me now
Like "who's that chick, that's rockin' kicks?
She gotta be from out of town"

So hard with my girls not around me
It's definitely not a Nashville party
Cause' all I see are stilettos
I guess I never got the memo.

Even though I was still skeptical about their choice of song, I remembered the words of Greene (1995) "Individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture – for all children – the sense of worthiness and agency" (p. 41). Until both Maria and Tina develop their own sense of worthiness and agency, it will be difficult for them to respect these in others.

Tommy.

When Tommy finally brought his creative project to me I had just about given up that he was going to participate. Our reading group had disbanded and the assignment request had been given for several weeks, and since I had not heard from him I surmised that he was not interested or he needed assistance. In the interim as I waited to see if Tommy was going to participate, I experienced several emotions. I was disappointed that Tommy did not care enough about what had transpired in our reading community to turn in a project. I was concerned that Tommy, being only one of two African-American biracial students in our reading community, had felt out of place therefore deciding he did not want to turn in a final creation. Finally, I experienced frustration with myself for my own lack of empathy as to Tommy's personal situation. As mentioned in an earlier section, Tommy is a latch-key child. He goes home each day to an empty house with

expectations that his homework will be done when his mother and grandmother arrive home from work. This extra assignment was probably too much for him. I was pleased when he finally brought his creation to my office.

Tommy chose to create a poster about the book, *The Cat's in Krasinski Square.* I would have to say that Tommy's choice surprised me. I thought that he would haven chosen a book to reflect the struggle of his ancestors. Just as I remembered in an earlier section I remembered that Tommy is a couple of generations removed from segregation and his knowledge of the practice of slavery is only what he has learned in class and from the fiction we have read. To Tommy the events of the Holocaust are equally as atrocious as slavery as they should be for all of us. Greene (2001) states "In the kind of world in which imagination is alive, people have the capacity to look through one another's eyes to take one's perspective upon the world" (p. 108). Tommy's capacity for caring spans race, religion, gender, and even social status.

Lucy.

I was not surprised that someone from our reading community chose to reflect upon the book, *The Lemonade Club*. It had been an emotional year with the devastating news that one of our fifth grade girls had cancer and then the fabulous news that she is now cancer-free. The fact that Lucy was the reading community member that chose to create the collage poster (See Figure 6) came as no surprise, either. As mentioned when Lucy was introduced, she has the capacity to connect all groups together. I believe this talent stems from the fact that she truly enjoys people. Not only the people within her social circle but everyone. Karen's cancer diagnosis touched a place within Lucy that

many of us will never realize. Her talent for empathizing with Karen's experience and her pain is reflected in Lucy's work.

Upon close inspection of Lucy's collage, one can see that she not only pointed out the medical side of dealing with cancer but she pointed out the physical and emotional side as well. One can see the catheter port that Karen had to wear during chemotherapy and the scarves and hats that are worn by people that lose their hair from chemotherapy. Present on the poster is the reminder that a hospital stay is necessary for people with cancer. What is also present on the poster is care that Lucy feels for people who are stricken with this disease. She has included cancer ribbons, hearts, beads of hope, and even the picture of the live oak. Reflecting the message of possibility from the book, Lucy chose to paint the entire background of her collage in lemon yellow as well as including baskets of lemons in strategic locations. Lucy's collage reminds all of us that even though only the person going through cancer can truly know how it feels, through an imagination of caring we all can help make the experience a little less painful.

Charlie.

Charlie, like Fallon, chose to take me up on my lack of guidelines for his creative expression. He asked if he could take the words that I had discussed with them on the last day that our reading community met, and put them together in a collage. He informed me that he knew that he was not choosing only one book but felt strongly about pulling all of the books together. Of course, I was agreeable as well as intrigued. Charlie is also quite the artist and has an uncanny ability to see how small things tie together to form a large picture. It was not difficult for him to see how all of the picturebooks that I

chose to read aloud to the reading community fit together to form a large picture. It was this large picture that Charlie wanted to create as his final project (See Figure 7).

Looking at Charlie's poster, one cannot help but feel a sense of possibility. Sitting at the bottom of the poster, anchoring all of the other words, is the word "Triumph". Charlie indicated that he chose to put this word at the bottom to tell the viewer that ultimately if we all try hard enough to respect each other and treat each other with kindness and respect, we will triumph over the evil in the world. Even though he added several pictures to illustrate some of the words, one cannot help to notice the sun that sits prominently on the poster. It is surrounded by words such as "renewal", "hope", "care", "truth", and finally topped with the word "opportunity" which he chose to draw with a flourish of color and font. Charlie explained the sun represents happiness and light, and those words around it can bring happiness and light. Finally, I was intrigued by the words "Unity", "Freedom", and "Joy" that he placed at the top of the poster. Charlie indicated that he really did not mean to put these together when he created his poster but looking at it he could see how these words work together. He indicated that when we all work together, in unity, we can bring about our freedom which would ultimately bring joy to everyone.

Conclusions

> Thus from the beginning, the heart of our research was motivated by surprise, wonder, and curiosity – all aspects of imaginative thought that helped us inquire more deeply into the meaning and implications of the event in question. (Gallas, 2003, p. 139)

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, there were five findings that emerged throughout my study. At first, my only goal was to find that reconceptualizing the way in which we read picturebooks aloud to children can help them imagine their past, present,

and future, in order to understand, question and change. As in most cases, the journey was often more satisfying than the destination. Even though most journeys are not always smooth and hazard free, they do seem to make a lasting impression on those who choose to travel. My findings while on my journey with my reading community made an impression that will last a lifetime.

Every picturebook I read aloud to my students not only stirred emotional responses within my listeners but within me as well **(Finding 1).** Even though I had read many of these picturebooks, dozens of times, they continued to have the capacity to make me weep, laugh, cringe, cheer, fume, and ponder. It was the reflection of emotion on my reading community's faces and our conversations that made these picturebooks new for me at each reading. Sumara (1996) reminds:

> For although the initial reading of the text is always conditioned by the reader's existing structure, the history of interactions between that reading and critical reflections on it can offer clearings for new paths of understanding. This is the power of sharing readings and interpretations of literary fictions with our students. (p. 205)

I found myself looking forward to our reading sessions, not for the data that I would be collecting but the conversations that would be taking place and the relationships between the community and the text that would be forged.

Fiction has always had the power to transform me into other worlds. I am one of those readers who become obsessed with a book and do not put it down until it is finished. On one particular family vacation, I was content to stay in the car from Savannah to Washington, D.C. allowing the beautiful scenery to pass because I was

engrossed in a novel. Although I had the capacity to imagine the scenes that were taking place within the novel, it was not until I began my journey within the Curriculum Studies Program at Georgia Southern University that I understood to what extent the idea of imagination could take a reader.

When I became immersed in the work of the many curriculum theorists, I realized that the reality I enjoyed as a white, college educated, middle class teacher raised by southern, conservative parents and educated in mostly white, conservative schools was not the reality enjoyed by millions of people in my past as well as my present. It took the writings of the reconceptualist curriculum scholars whom I was assigned to read in my program to make me realize that my education had gone lacking and my view of the world was truly myopic. It took the writings of Paulo Freire to make me realize that if I was going to change my own narrow view of the world, I would have to become in charge of my own awakening. I recognized that I wanted this freedom for the students who visited my media center each day. It took the writings of Maxine Greene, Dennis Sumara, Louise Rosenblatt, and Karen Gallas to help me discover that through the use of fiction, namely picturebooks, complicated conversation, and creative expression, both my reading community and myself, could imagine a much different future than the reality we were living at the present.

Another finding that I discovered while on my journey was that reading communities within the school have the potential to provide a safe-environment in which students can come together to read, discuss, and reflect on literature that will enable them to imagine the past, question the present, and find possibility in the future **(Finding 2).** I chose to use a reading community for my study as part of my methodology. I not only

wanted to read aloud to a group of students, I also wanted to create a community where each participant could share their thoughts and personal stories. Gallas (2003) explains:

> In establishing this open pedagogical space, we allow imagination to enter into our work as teachers and as researchers; we make room in the classroom for doubt, intuition, curiosity, wonder, risk taking, and experimentation; we challenge ourselves and our students to shift our perspectives on teaching and learning. (p. 143)

Though at times, I found myself slipping from my task as facilitator, I made every effort to encourage doubt, intuition, curiosity, wonder, and risk taking, and experimentation. Freire (2005) reminds "Listening to all that come to us, regardless of their intellectual level, is a human duty and reveals an identification with democracy and not with elitism" (p. 72). I recognized that by becoming an authoritarian instead of a facilitator, my community would refrain sharing their lived experience.

Thinking about the many conversations that I discussed in my dissertation and even the ones I did not, there were members of my reading community who made my job as facilitator easy. My conversations with Fallon and Charlie were not only enlightening but were always entertaining. I looked forward to each session with these two members just for the challenge of where their thoughts would go. The dialogue that flowed between most of the reading community and the rest of the reading community was straightforward and effortless.

On the other hand, there were students who made it difficult for me as facilitator. The dialogue that flowed between them and the rest of the reading community was often combative and difficult. Gallas (1994) states "I have learned that when each

member of the classroom community strives to affirm the importance of all voices, the benefit for every child is much greater" (p. 35). Agreeing with Gallas, I felt that it was important to keep the reading community intact, so I was careful to keep these students on track without becoming condescending or allowing the rest of the reading community to shun their input.

I did not want the sense of community and the flow of dialogue to be stifled. Gallas (2003) describes these breaks within the reading community as "points of rupture" (p. 141). She believes that these places where students find conflict with the story and with the conversation is "[w]here ethnography begins, precisely because inquiry enables us to look freshly and imaginatively at an event – to make the familiar strange" (p. 142). In other words, Gallas has charged the educator to look forward to those students who cause conflict within the group because it makes the teacher work harder to understand the conflict which in turn makes for complicated conversation.

My next finding on my journey actually confirmed what I had assumed even before I began my study. Children who lead an almost idyllic life living happily within the dominant culture do not see the need to question and change the status quo. Children, who find no connection to the atrocities committed in the past, do not see the need to understand in order to change the future. Children, who are mirrored in the literature that is available to them, do not often go searching for something different to read. Children who are content with their present do not often worry about the future **(Finding 3).**

My original assumptions were based upon my own autobiography. I knew going into this study that the most of the members of my reading community had lives that paralleled my own childhood. As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, I grew

up in the same community as my reading community. I attended the same school, the same churches, and participated in the same activities. Though neither of my parents attended college, my own college attendance was an eventuality, not an uncertainty. I never worried about my future because my present was in good hands. I never thought to question the world around me because the world around me was close to perfect, or so I thought. I never questioned white privilege because I lived white privilege. I never questioned hegemony because those in power took very good care of my needs. I see my youth reflected in the lives of the hundreds of students who walk through my library doors every day. It only took one session with my reading community to confirm that they were not just a reflection of my childhood, they **were** my childhood.

Reflecting upon several of the discussions that took place during my reading sessions I found that my reading community was not only disconnected from their past, they were disconnected from some of the social issues of the present, and had little cause for concern for the future. Fallon's matter-of-fact attitude about the consequences of war when we read *Faithful Elephants* was indicative of someone who had never thought a whole lot about all of the innocent creatures that are destroyed when countries choose to go to war. Chip's lack of empathy for the plight of the homeless family in *Fly Away Home* illuminates for us the lack of understanding that many people have for those who cannot make enough money to support a family. Tommy's indifference as to how he could make a difference in order to preserve the earth's natural resources when we read *Just A Dream* shows just how little we think about the future when we are content with the present.

Having confirmed these assumptions, I accepted the task of awakening these

students to a world beyond their own world without risking possible refusal. I recognized that I needed to choose a medium that would enable my reading community to imagine a world beyond their own while keeping their interest. I needed to choose a medium that would challenge them to question the status quo without feeling threatened because they live within the status quo. Finally, I needed to choose a medium that would persuade them to continue search for more answers. The medium that I chose to fulfill the task was the picturebook.

Reading picturebooks aloud to children is always a worthy endeavor. Just going through the motions of gathering a group of children, reading the text, and sharing the illustrations produces benefits that go beyond the classroom walls. Educator and book author, Jim Trelease (2001), discusses the importance of reading aloud, "If a child is old enough to talk to, he's old enough to be read to. It's the same language" (p 35). He explains that many parents begin talking to their child before it is born therefore parents should begin reading to their child before it is born as well. He lists the reasons for reading aloud to a child as "conditions the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure, creates background knowledge, builds vocabulary, and provides a reading role model" (p 2).

However, through this study I found that reconceptualizing the way we read aloud to our students we can cultivate new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and imagining. By reading aloud, both critically and aesthetically, towards a curriculum of imagination, the reading community can come to terms with its sense of identity and imagine the possibilities of the future **(Finding 4).** Trelease (2001) suggests that when reading aloud, parents, caregivers, and teachers should discuss the "[t]houghts, hopes, fears, and discoveries that are aroused by a book. Allow them to surface and help the child to deal with them through verbal, written, or artistic expression if the child is so

inclined" (p 62). It was the back and forth conversation between my reading community and me, the back and forth conversations within the reading community, and the back and forth conversation between the picturebook and its readers that brought about understanding and ultimately, imagining.

I found that by reading the picturebook aloud, while stopping along the way to examine both the text and the illustrations and then engaging in complicated conversations, my community and I began to make connections to our own lives and to each other. Sumara (1996) tells "The question, then, of what reading literary fictions reveals to us is not nearly as interesting as the question of what the reading them reveals about us" (p. 38). Much was revealed as we progressed through the picturebook reading sessions.

It was confirmed for me that Fallon, though over-confident and opinionated, had the capacity to find meaning within the texts and connect them to her world. Thinking back to her insight when we discussed the idea of parenting and identity in *Voices in the Park*, I knew that Fallon recognized that it was not necessary for a parent to spend money in order to show their love. I also discovered through her dance interpretation of the book, *Fly Away Home,* that Fallon possesses the ability to imagine possibility.

I discovered that Tina recognized the pain of being excluded. She also learned that being the center of attention also has its negative side. Even though I was appalled by Tina's pronouncement about the unfairness of children's menus when we discussed *Fly Away Home*, I appreciated that she was willing to be honest in our reading community. As I looked around the group after her declaration, I saw many in the reading community agreeing with her, though silently. It was only after she first explained, and then

performed, along with Maria, her understanding of the book, *Grandmama's Pride* that I discovered that much of Tina's façade is there to hide her own fear of being excluded. I think that reading and discussing this picturebook helped Tina to imagine the true meaning of exclusion in order to put hers into perspective and to rethink her own part in excluding others.

Even though Maria has been visiting my library for several years, I never realized the extent of Maria's insecurity about her ethnic origins until we started meeting as a reading community. Her assurance to the group that even though her Hispanic mother works in a hotel, she works in the office and is not a maid, let us know that she is very much aware of how the world sees people considered "other". Both her parents' job status is very important to her and seems to give her the confidence to be a part of any group. It was our picturebook discussion of *The Lemonade Club* that I discovered how insecure Maria is in her relationship with Tina. Maria's part in the dance interpretation of *Grandmama's Pride*, like Tina, proved that Maria's capacity to imagine real-life segregation only helped her to deal with her own insecurities and her place within the hierarchy of a social group.

I learned that Tommy, a biracial child living in a world of white children, could transfer his otherness to empathize with those who were also considered other. Even though he seems to be unaffected by the fact that he is not white, his choosing to create a poster about *The Cats In Krasinski Square* showed that he is not totally immune to the notion of other. I failed to mention in the earlier paragraph that discussed Tommy's creative product that he added a small quote to his poster that is interesting to note. At the very bottom of his poster he put the words "The Grass is Always Greener" (See Figure 1)

to reflect the longing that the people on the other side of the Ghetto wall were feeling. I wonder if Tommy, who is not only racially different but also socially different because he is being raised by a single mother and single grandmother, ever views his classmates as living on "greener grass". Almost all words that Tommy put on his poster were descriptive terms: "upbeat, good times, happy, plain, old, boring, and sad" (Figure1). Tommy's ability to imagine how people on both sides of the wall must have felt shows a depth of empathy rare in so young a student.

I made peace with the fact that Chip was entitled to his beliefs. I also recognized that not all of our conversations ended with an impasse. Looking back on our discussions, I only seemed to have dwelled on the conversations in which we disagreed. I spent a lot of time examining his attitude when we discussed *Fly Away Home* and homelessness and his opinion about the future in *Just A Dream* instead of examining one of the conversations with which Chip and I did agree. It was our discussion about The *Cats In Krasinski Square* where I learned that the same rigid code that did not enable Chip to look at multiple sides of social issues also gave him a sense of what creates a hero. In Chip's mind a hero is someone who is willing to take a risk for someone else no matter how important or how insignificant. Chip's gift to be able to imagine a better world when one is willing to risk their reputation, social standing, and even their life is quite admirable.

Like Tommy, I recognized from the beginning of our reading community that Lucy, who is also biracial, was well aware that she was part of the minority in the group. Also like Tommy, Lucy appeared on the surface not to be bothered by this fact. Unlike Tommy, Lucy's social status within the group did bother her. When I examined our

conversation while discussing the picturebook, *A Day's Work*, I noticed that Lucy was very sensitive to the idea of work. We happen to discuss this book during the time that her parents had split, her father had been laid-off from a well paying job, and the family had to move in with relatives. Not only was Lucy living as a racial minority, she was living as a social minority as well. Lucy's defense of the boy's lie in the story showed just how important it was to Lucy that someone be able to find and secure a job reflecting her own situation.

What is interesting to note is that in our discussion of the picturebook, *Grandmama's Pride*, Lucy indicated that even though she had experienced social exclusion, she had never experienced the kind of segregation and prejudice that her great grandmother and maybe even her grandmother had experienced. Lucy admitted that she had participated in excluding others from her own social group but after reading *Grandmama's Pride* Lucy indicated that she would think twice before ever excluding anyone again. By imagining the lives of people who lived a life much more difficult than hers, Lucy was able to come to terms with her own shaky place within her social group.

Hillary's peacemaking ability had always seemed to be an asset within her peer group. However, it became evident that this same need to please and to keep everyone happy actually hindered Hillary's ability to hold her peers accountable and to question the inequities she discovered as we read each picturebook. Even her journal writing reflected her need for everyone to get along. As mentioned in an earlier section, her choice of a live oak anchored with roots of kindness, inclusion, and peacemaking was quite inspired. I appreciated that Hillary knew exactly the correct words and the correct actions to bring about peace both locally and globally. In this respect, the world could use

more Hillarys. It was our conversations about the picturebooks, *Voices in the Park* and *Appelemando's Dreams* that gave me cause to reflect. After we read the first picturebook, Hillary indicated that even though her parents made decisions with which she disagreed, she accepted them because she trusted her parents. Recognizing that Hillary is just ten years old, I respected her obedience. After we read, the second picturebook, Hillary indicated that she had dreams but did not want to share them because someone might take them away. I worry that Hillary's need to please will hold her back when the time comes for her to stand up for her beliefs and dreams. I hope that by imagining the possibilities of her dreams, she will find the courage to fly free.

My time with Mario afforded me the opportunity to discover that the timid boy who hid behind paper moustaches was also hiding a soul of great depth. I knew that Mario is kind. I knew that he is intelligent. What I did not know is that he has the sensitivity and the wisdom to make the connection between both his social studies text and the stories that we read. Mario's aptitude for putting human faces on the facts from his text enabled him to imagine what really happened on the slave ships, on the plantations, during the Holocaust, during the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and during the time when racial equality was only a dream. One look at Mario's own picturebook (See Figure 1) shows that not only does he have an understanding of the events that took place in our past; he has the ability to imagine how these events could never happen again.

I have known Jake since he was born. I have also known that he is quite sensitive and easily hurt. Like Hillary, he is a pleaser and also wants to be pleased. It was during our time together as a reading community that I really came to see Jake as being more

than just a popular boy who is easily hurt. I learned that Jake has the ability to use his sensitivity to discover multiple layers within a story. In *Voices In The Park*, it was Jake who discovered that multiple stories were being told on each page. His insight led the entire reading community to understand that how we personally view a situation is only one of many viewpoints. Regarding the picturebook, *The Middle Passage*, it was Jake who wanted me to shelve this book until young students like his sister were old enough to fully grasp the message of the book. It was Jake who explained to me that it is often necessary to read be the lines of the history textbook as to what the authors are saying and not saying. Finally, it was Jake who without prompting from his art teacher took a basic assignment and turned it into a message about difference, acceptance, and inclusion (See Figure 2).

During the time I spent with Charlie, I discovered that one can be a realist and a dreamer, an athlete and a scholar, and a writer and an artist all at the same time. Charlie is all of these things and more. I looked forward to what tidbit of information that Charlie would add to each picturebook discussion. His invention of the word "goman" to refer to Browne's depiction of the adults in *Voices In The Park* as gorillas was quite ingenious. His sensitivity to the atrocities portrayed in the picturebook, *The Middle Passage* was quite moving. His insight as to illustrator Stephen Gammell's allegorical intent in *Terrible Things* was quite extraordinary. Even though I have expressed all of these remarkable qualities possessed by Charlie, I still could not help but worry that Charlie would become so caught up in the small picture that he would miss the bigger one. After viewing his final creation, I found that my fears were unnecessary. Charlie's collage of

words and pictures served to inspire us all as to what is possible when we dare to imagine.

Ultimately, through the our reconceptualized picturebook sessions, I learned that like my entire reading community, I have a long way to go and many picturebooks to read in order to imagine, if ever, the violence committed against other human beings in the past. It will take many more picturebooks to imagine what it is like to be homeless, an illegal immigrant, part of religion that has been profiled as violent, a minority living among the majority, a child living inside an imperfect body, or even a child who may not live to reach puberty.

Lastly, it will take many more picturebooks to be able to imagine a world where difference is celebrated, respect of humans and creatures alike is practiced, and concern for future generations is evident. As a librarian, I can supply those picturebooks, as an educator, I can seek to create reading communities, and as a teacher leader, I can only hope to encourage fellow teachers and parents, to join my effort.

Educators and parents must seek to provide children with historically accurate, socially conscious, and real world connected picturebooks to begin the conversation that will help them seek to understand, to question and then seek to change status quo **(Finding 5).** In other words, we must go beyond the textbook in order to fuel the imagination. Doll (2000) states "Textbook 'writing' only serves to keep imagination thin" (p. 28). Aoki & Jackson (2007) state "For us, introductory textbooks can be valuable and productive *because* of they are deeply incoherent" (para. 21). In other words, millions upon millions of children every day learn the stories of European expansion, Native American displacement, causes of war, slavery, segregation, genocide, economic growth

and crises, ecological exploitation, and supply and demand as told by the authors employed by the textbook companies whose largest motive is profit. Aoki & Jackson go on to explain "[e]very text—including every line of every intro textbook—should be regarded as a situation of language as politics, as a fraught place where power, ideology, and institutional and personal agendas are played out, sustained and—if we are conscientious and fortunate—contested" (para. 21). Unfortunately, many of our teachers and students only know the side of the story as told by the text. One cannot contest what one is does not know.

Doll (2000) refers to what students learn from the textbook as literalism. She states "Mythmaker poets and cinematographers, along with writers, have helped us to imagine the horrors of our time differently – to see it for what it is in all its shock but to take us beyond literalism" (p. xviii). Doll regards the layers, or lack of layers, of the textbook as being "horizontals" (p.29). That is the textbook is a one sided set of "facts" as told by a textbook author therefore affording us only the opportunity to explore only one layer of ourselves. Doll proposes the use of stories to add "verticals" or multiple layers to the facts (p. 29). She explains "The story, if it is a real story, takes us into a vertical dimension of ourselves, where, perhaps, we have not journeyed before" (p. 29).

Greene (1995) states "The texts are here. We have to make them accessible, offer protocols, and keep them open. We have to allow opportunities for students to structure their experiences by means of those texts, by means of books men and women have made" (p. 120). It is not a matter of finding the picturebooks; it is a matter of encouraging educators and parents to be willing to create a reading community. David Orr (2002) proposes "[a]dults should turn off the television, disconnect the cable, undo the computer,

and once again read good books aloud to their children. I know of no better or more pleasurable way to stimulate thinking, encourage a love of language, and facilitate the child's ability to form images" (p. 58).

With more emphasis placed upon standardized testing, the classroom teacher spends less time reading aloud with their students. To ask them to reconceptualize their read-aloud, is asking even more. With both parents working outside the home, parents often working more than one job, the rise of single parent homes, and an increase in homework to prepare for standardized testing, parents are spending less time reading aloud to their children. To ask them to reconceptualize their bedtime read-aloud is asking even more. This where I have made it my mission and my passion to demonstrate what can come from the reconceptualized read-aloud in hopes that both teachers and parents will join my efforts.

Can the benefits of the reconceptualized read-aloud be measured quantitatively? Probably not. Will the reconceptualized read-aloud produce exceptional results on a standardized test? Probably not. Will the reconceptualized read-aloud decrease school truancy? Maybe. Will the reconceptualized read-aloud decrease school violence? Possibly. Will the reconceptualized read-aloud change the attitude with which a student views schooling? More than likely. Can I guarantee my responses to all of these questions? Not likely. Do I think that my findings warrant a study beyond a mere ten weeks? Definitely. Greene (1995) states:

> As teachers, we cannot predict the common world that may be in the making; nor can we finally justify one kind of community more than the other. We cannot

> bring warmth into places where young persons come together, however; we can bring dialogues and laughter that threaten monologues and rigidity. (pg 43)

All I can guarantee is that the reconceptualized read-aloud has the potential to change the climate in the classroom forever.

Finally, looking back upon my time with my reading community I know that Fallon came to the reading community with opinions in abundance, Hillary came unwilling to challenge her classmates, Charlie came with superiority, Tina came with self-importance, Maria came with insecurity, Chip came with rigid attitudes and beliefs, Tommy came with indifference, Lucy came with anxiety, Jake came with sensitive feelings, and Mario came with timidity. Realistically, I know that the time spent with my reading community, reading aloud, engaging in complicated conversation, and creative expression did not profoundly change these individuals. They all still exhibit the same characteristics with which they started our journey. However, during our journey they each displayed a certain amount of sensitivity, insight, empathy, compassion, outrage, shock, disgust, horror, grief, hope, joy, and possibility. Did I facilitate these emotions? Definitely, not.

Greene (2001) explains "In many respects, I know, it is a matter of choice on the part of the learner, since, as we all know, we cannot learn anyone; we have somehow or another to create the kind of situations in which students will pose questions, articulate the kind of curiosity or the kinds of wonder in which learning begins" (p. 136). I did not "learn anyone" during our journey together. What I did, however, was bring together a community of readers, a collection of historically accurate, culturally responsive, and real-world applicable picturebooks, a non-threatening place for complicated conversation

and imagination, and a risk-free opportunity for creative expression. What did I get for my efforts? Time can only tell. Like the lotus seed that was tossed into the mud and forgotten, I can only hope that the seeds I tossed during our journey will one day grow and bloom into humane individuals who can imagine their past, present and future, in order to understand, question, and ultimately, change their world.

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Figure 1. Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust by Bunting - Creative Expression (Picturebook) by Mario

Figure 2. Grandmama's Pride by Becky Birtha. Creative Expression (Watercolor) by Jake

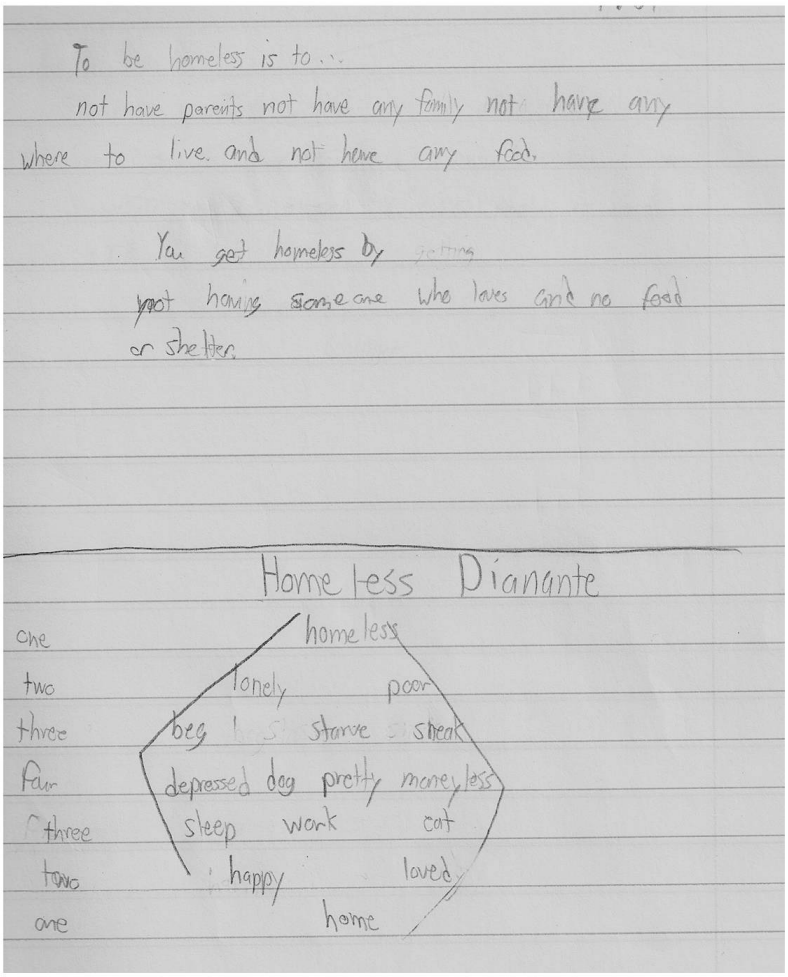

Figure 3. Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting. Journal Entry by Chip.

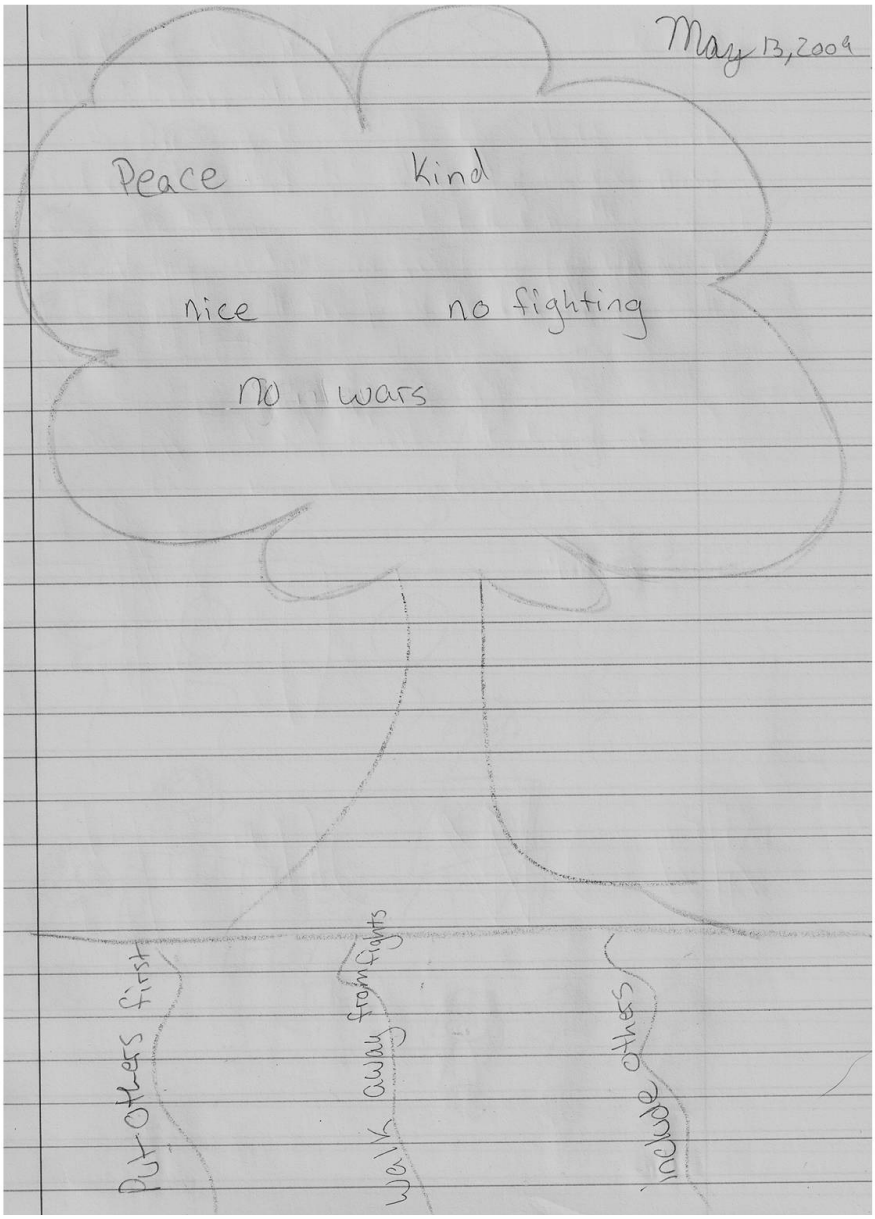

Figure 4. The Lotus Seed by Sherry Garland. Journal Entry by Hillary

Figure 5. The Cats In Krasinski Square by Karen Hesse. Creative Expression (Poster Collage) by Tommy

Figure 6. The Lemonade Club by Patricia Polacco. Creative Expression (Poster Collage) by Lucy

Figure 7. Message of Picturebooks. Creative Expression (Word Collage) by Charlie